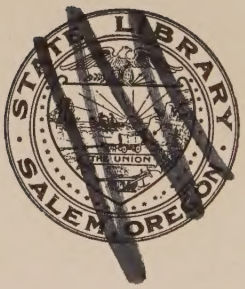
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CIVILIZATION

This book was awarded
the Goncourt Prize in
Paris for the year 1918

CIVILIZATION

1914--1917

BY

GEORGES DUHAMEL

(DENIS THÉVENIN)

TRANSLATED BY

E. S. BROOKS

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Poignant, masterly sketches written by an army surgeon who, in his grief for the enormity of war suffering, wishes to bring us deliberately to weigh our pitiful so-called civilization in which man vents himself on his neighbor. Their irony is wholly sympathetic and often touched with humor for the whimsical side of trench and hospital life. Written by the author of *The new book of martyrs* (*Booklist,* 15:19, O 18) This collection won the Goncourt prize of 1918.

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Published, March, 1919

TO
CHARLES VIANNAY

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CIVILIZATION

CIVILIZATION

I

THE FACE

A GREAT brow, almost graceful in design, an expression at once profound and child-like, a dimpled chin, a proud mustache, a bitter gaiety about the mouth—I shall recollect you, face of France, even though it is only for the single second that I saw you, in the flare of a match.

The train that went from Châlons to Sainte-Menehould, that autumn night, was on the way up again, with all lights extinguished. It was in 1916. The face of Champagne, calm just then, was sleeping at our left, the sleep of the craters, a sleep full of nightmares, sudden starts, and flashes of lightning. We cut through the darkness, making our way slowly through a wretched country which we could see was disfigured with the hide-

ous raiment of war. The little train hobbled along, panting, slightly hesitant, like a blind man that knows his way.

I was coming back from a furlough. I was feeling ill and had stretched myself out on a bench. In front of me three officers were talking. Their voices were those of young men; their military experience was that of veterans. They were on their way to rejoin their regiment.

"That sector," said one of them, "is calm just now."

"That 's certain," said another. "We sha'n't have any trouble there until spring."

A sort of silence followed, torn by the clatter of the rails under the wheels. Presently a keen, youthful, laughing voice said, quite low:

"Oh! They 'll be sure to get us into some sort of tomfoolery before spring."

Then, without transition, the man who had just spoken added:

"This will be the twelfth time that I 've gone into action. But I 'm always in luck: I have never been wounded but once."

These two phrases have remained in my ears ever since, because the man who uttered them struck a match and began to smoke. The flare gave me a fleeting glimpse of a charming face. The man belonged to a famous corps. The insignia of the highest honors that can be granted to young officers glittered on his light-brown jacket. His whole presence radiated a sane and tranquil courage.

The night again took possession of the compartment. But will there ever be a night black enough to rob me of the image glimpsed in that flash of light? Will there ever be a silence heavy enough to stifle the echo of those two little phrases murmured amid the humming of the train?

I have often thought of them since, whenever, as on this evening, filled with anguish and love, I have turned my mind, now to the past, now to the future of these Frenchmen, my brothers, who in such great numbers have accepted death without forgoing the expression of what their hearts contain, those Frenchmen of whose grandeur

of soul, indomitable intelligence, and touching naïveté the world knows too little.

Could I help thinking of this now, at the consummation of the martyrdom of a wonderful people which in the midst of a night that has no shore seeks for nothing but the boon of order and self-preservation?

II

ON THE SOMME

I HAD no desire for laughter, and yet at times I felt a vague longing to laugh. It was when I thought of those men who write about the war in the newspapers, saying: "The breach has been made. Why do we hesitate to fling fifty divisions into it?" or, "It remains only to mass reserves close to the front. Quick! Four hundred thousand men into the breach."

I should have liked to set those fellows to work to find, between Fouilloy and Maricourt, a space big enough for the cat that purrs on their piles of strategical papers. They would have had a bit of a job.

As I walked along I mused over my affairs; from time to time I would cast a glance over the country-side, and I assure you I saw some curious things.

Under the poplars that stretch down the length

of the valley an immense army lay hidden, with its battalions, its animals, its wagons, all its artillery, its discolored tents, its evil-smelling leather, its filth. The horses were nibbling the bark of the great trees, which were dying, the victims of a premature autumn. A surging mass were trying to hide themselves, as if the face of heaven were one vast betrayal. A trio of puny elms served as shelter for a whole encampment; a dusty hedge hid under its shadow the fighting equipment of an entire army. But the vegetation was sparse and the shelter scanty, so that the army overflowed everywhere across the naked plain, scraping the roads to the quick, until they showed their bare skeletons, streaking the fields with tracks like those left by the passage of great herds of wild animals.

There were joint roads where the French and the English moved side by side. There you saw filing past the fine British artillery, quite new, not rusty, but shining, covered with light-colored cloth, its horses selected for their coloring and all well fed and well groomed like circus mounts. Some in-

fantry was going by also, nothing but young men. The flutes and drums of various sorts made a savage music for them, like that of the Senegalese. And then some great two-storied cars went by, carrying with scarcely a tremor the wounded who with their fair hair and their surprised expressions still had the placid look of Cook's tourists.

Our villages were filled to bursting. Man had thrust himself in everywhere, like an epidemic, like an inundation. He had driven the beasts from their quarters and installed himself in the stables, in the cattle-sheds, in the burrows. The stores of shells, here and there, looked like potteries full of earthenware jugs.

The slimy water of the canal was loaded with barges, carrying provisions, guns, hospital supplies.

A vehement vibration replaced the usual silence, caused by the breathing of all these beings and the grinding sound of their machines. The whole landscape suggested some sort of sinister kermess, some festival of war, some gathering of rowdies and gipsy bands.

CIVILIZATION

The closer we came to Bray, the more congested the country seemed. The automobiles ruled over the highways tyrannically, pushing out into the fields the humble convoys drawn by horses. Some little trucks, built close to the ground, their backs loaded with thousands of cartridges, showed their independence by tooting ostentatiously; between the cases men were squatting, half asleep, mutely testifying that it is sweet to be seated on something that does your walking for you.

When I arrived above Chipilly I saw a strange sight. A vast plateau rolled away, covered with so many men, objects, and beasts that over great stretches the earth was no longer visible. Beyond the ruined tower that rises above Etinehem extended a landscape that was brown, reddish, like a heath ravaged by fire. Later I found that this color was due to the accumulation of horses, crowded one against another. Every day they led twenty-two thousand to drink at the muddy watering-place in the Somme. They turned the trails into mire and filled the air with a formidable odor of sweat and dung.

Farther to the left there rose a veritable city of unbleached tents, with red crosses quartered on their tops. Beyond this the ground dropped abruptly and stretched away toward the battlefield, trembling under its black smoke against the horizon. Here and there rose, side by side, puffs of smoke from a hail of shells, all in a line like trees along a road. There were thirty balloons or more in a circle high overhead, like curious idlers watching a quarrel.

The adjutant pointed to the tents and said to me:

"That 's Hill 80 over there! You 'll see more wounded go through that place than there are hairs on your head, and more blood flow than there is water in the canal. All those who fall between Combles and Bouchavesnes are brought there."

I nodded, and we returned to our reflections. The daylight was fading out in the dim mists of the marshes. Some heavy pieces of English artillery were firing not far away from us, and their sound hurtled over the plain like a furious charger,

dashing blindly onward. The horizon was peopled with so many guns that one heard a continuous rumble like that of an immense caldron boiling over a brazier.

The adjutant turned to me again:

"You have had three brothers killed by the enemy. In one sense, you are out of it all. You will not be badly off as a stretcher-bearer. It 's unpleasant in a way, but it 's a whole lot better than being in the line; is n't it?"

I did not answer. I was thinking of the desolate little valley, facing the ridge of Plémont, where I had passed the beginning of the summer. I had endured there hours of deadly tedium, watching through the shattered poplars the horror-stricken apple-trees along the chaotic road, the shell-holes filled with a sickeningly green, oozing water, the mute, reproachful face of the castle of Plessier, and that frightful hill which only a cosmic upheaval could have thrown up from the dismal depths of some dream. There, during long nights of guard duty, I had inhaled the fetid breath of fields thickly sown with corpses. In the

solitude of utter despair I had experienced by turns the fear and the desire of death. And then, one day, they had come to me, saying, "You are to return to the rear; your third brother has just been killed." And many who looked at me seemed to be thinking, as the adjutant thought: "Your third brother is dead! In a sense you 're in luck."

I was thinking of all this as I made my way toward my new destination. We were picking our way over that plateau, raised like an altar toward the sky, loaded as if for a sacrifice with millions of creatures.

There had been no rain for several days and we were living in the kingdom of dust. Dust is the toll exacted for fine weather; it permeates the hounds of war, mingles in their work, their food, their thoughts; it soils the lips, grits the teeth, and inflames the eyes. It spoils the honest joy of breathing. But when it disappears, the reign of mud begins, and the soul thrives better in dust than in mud.

In the distance great currents of dust like slug-

gish rivers marked all the roads of the country, spreading themselves all over the landscape at the will of the winds. It sullied the sunlight, as the sky was affronted by great flocks of aviators, as the silence was affronted and sullied, as the earth and its raiment of verdure were sullied and defiled.

I had little enough inclination for joy, as it was, but all this made me fairly drunk with misery.

As my glances fell on my surroundings, I could find no place on which to rest them but the innocent eyes of the horses or those of a few miserable, frightened men who were working along the rough roads. Save for them, the whole world was nothing but a bristling camp.

Night was falling as we reached the city of tents. The adjutant led me toward a *tortoise* and found a place for me on the straw, which smelled like a pig-pen. I set my pack down, stretched myself out, and went to sleep.

Rising with the dawn, I steered my way through the fog and tried to get my bearings.

ON THE SOMME

There was a road, the road from Albert, worn full of hollows, jammed with traffic. Along it flowed the never-ending stream of the wounded. Beside this road rose up the city of tents, with its streets, its districts, its public squares. Behind the tents there was a cemetery. That was all.

I leaned against a post and I looked at the cemetery. It was already overflowing; it had a famished air. A lot of German prisoners were at work digging long trenches that gaped like open jaws. Two officers passed; one of them was stout and seemed, early as it was, to be on the point of an apoplectic fit. He was saying to the other, with frantic gestures:

"We have two hundred graves ready and nearly as many coffins. No, no! They can never say that this offensive was not prepared for!"

There were, in fact, a great many coffins waiting. They filled a tent where some men were hastily laying out the corpses. Out in the open a large gang of carpenters were cutting up pine boards. They were whistling and singing inno-

cently, as men usually do when they are busy with their hands.

It was to this work that I was assigned that very day, the reason given being that in my youth I had had something to do with furniture designing.

Once more I learned that every man judges even the most imposing events only from the point of view that his profession and his habits afford him. There was a sergeant there whose opinion of the World War depended on the quality of the wood he had to work with. When the wood was poor, he would say: "This war 's a hopeless mess!" But when the wood had no knots in it he would asseverate: "We 'll get them."

An anxious busybody of a young man had undertaken the overwhelming task of directing the whole hospital. He would appear at all hours, his fingers clasping bundles of papers that passed ceaselessly from one hand to the other. I seldom had occasion to hear him speak, but almost every time I surprised the same words: "That does n't

concern me. I have nothing to do with that! I have trouble enough already."

I realized that he had a great many things to think about. Nearly all day automobiles, weighted down with groaning cargoes, followed one another along the curved roadway, which was being hastily paved and which was like the ravenous mouth of this vast organism. At the top of the curve the cars would be emptied under a porch adorned with flags that somewhat resembled the decorated canopy set up at a church door on the day of a wedding.

On the very first evening I received orders to serve as a stretcher-bearer for the cars that arrived at night. There were about fifteen of us assembled under the porch for the same task.

Up till then I had merely seen my comrades who were wounded beside me in the trenches setting off on a long, mysterious journey of which we knew little. The wounded man was spirited away; he disappeared from the battle-field. I now learned to know all the stages of the dreary life which at that moment began for him.

The evening on which I began my duties there had been something going on over by Maurepas or Le Forest; it was between two great days of battle, one of those occurrences that sometimes fail to get even a line from the writer of the communiqués. Nevertheless, the wounded streamed in all night. As soon as they were out of the cars we dispatched them into the main tent This was an immense canvas hall lighted by electricity. It had been set up in a stubble-field, and its rough floor was still bristling with dry grass and half-crushed lumps of turf. Those wounded who were able to walk were sent in line into a sort of passage between two railings, such as one sees at the entrance of theaters where the queue forms. They looked dazed and exhausted. They were relieved of their arms, cutlasses, and grenades; they submitted like children overcome with sleep. Then they were questioned. The great European massacre insists on order. Every act of the drama is regulated with minute exactness. As fast as the men filed past they were counted and enveloped in red tape; secretaries verified their identity with the cold ex-

actness of custom-house clerks. As for them, they answered with the patience of the eternal public at the administrative wicket. At times they permitted themselves a reflection. One infantryman was asked:

"Your name is Menu?"

And the infantryman replied, with an air of distress: "Oh, yes! unfortunately!"

I recall one poor little fellow who carried his arm in a sling. A doctor consulted his files and said: "You have a wound in the right arm?"

And the man replied modestly: "Oh! it 's not a wound, it 's only a hole."

In one corner they were distributing food and drink; a cook was cutting portions of beef and also slicing a big round of gruyère cheese. The wounded were seizing the provisions in their hands, which were covered with earth and blood, and chewing them with slow delight. One divined that a great many were suffering most of all from hunger and thirst. They sat timidly on a bench, like poor people who have been asked into the refreshment-room at an entertainment.

Opposite these men were a score of German wounded who had been unloaded there, helter-skelter. They dozed, or flung quick, hungry glances at the food and the pails of steaming tea. Recalling a famous jest, a gray-haired infantryman, who was stuffing large pieces of boiled beef between his jaws, suddenly said to the cook:

"Come now! A bit of the roast, no matter who they are!"

"Friends of yours?" said the cook, good-humoredly.

"Friends of mine, those cattle! We 've rubbed elbows together the whole blessed day! Come, hand them over a bit of the roast, no matter who they are.

A spruce young man with a bony nose and short-sighted eyes added, in a reserved tone: "We must do it for the sake of our reputation."

And they continued to chat gravely, tossing off cups of boiling tea, which were poured out for them from a tin pitcher.

On the other side of the tent the spectacle was quite different: the wounded were all lying down;

they were the seriously injured. Ranged side by side on the uneven ground, they formed a mosaic of suffering humanity, colored with the tints of war, dirt, and blood; smelling with the odors of war, sweat, and putrefaction; clamorous with the cries, the lamentations, the death-rattle that are the very voice and music of war.

This spectacle froze me with horror. I had known what it is to rise up for the slaughter, to go over the top, to be in at the death. I had to learn another horror, that of the "tableau," the swarm of prostrate victims, the sight of this vast hall with its mass of human larvæ writhing on the floor.

I had finished my stretcher-bearing and I busied myself among the wounded with all the awkwardness of one who means well but has been too deeply moved. Some of them were vomiting, in the most frightful suffering, their foreheads streaming with sweat. The greater part were motionless and self-possessed, as if mindful of the inward progress of their ailment. One of them especially quite unnerved me. He was a little fair-haired sergeant

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with a delicate mustache. He was weeping in his hand with a despair that was like shame. I asked him if he was in pain. He could scarcely reply. Then gently lifting his covering, I saw that a machine-gun had cruelly wounded him. And I felt a profound compassion for his youth and his tears.

There was also a young boy who screamed out at regular intervals a curious lamentation, a lamentation of his own province of which I could only grasp these syllables: "Ah! mon . . . don . . . ah! mon . . . don . . ."

A doctor who was passing said to him: "Come, have a little patience! Don't scream like that!"

The lad stopped a moment to reply: "You 'd have to be without a voice not to scream."

And he immediately began again to cry: "Ah! mon . . . don . . ." keeping time as if this rhythm and these words were a necessary part of his agony.

Next to him was a rough fellow with heavy, powerful features, with that shape of the skull and that peculiar growth of hair that mark the men of Auvergne. He looked at the young boy who was

groaning by his side and, turning to me, summed things up with a shrug of his shoulders: "Awful, is n't it?—to be smashed up like that boy, there!"

"How about you?" I said to him. "What have you got?"

"Oh! I? It looks as if I had n't any feet left. But I 've got plenty of health. My carcass is whole."

And it was true: I saw that he had had both feet blown off.

The electric lights were surrounded by a loathsome nimbus. On the walls of the tent, in the folds, one saw great black clumps of sleeping flies, subdued by the chill of the night.

Little by little the room was emptied. Great billows rolled over the canvas and made it tremble or flap violently, agitated now by the wind, now by the shock of a gun.

I took a few cautious steps over the stretchers and found myself outside in the rumbling night, lighted up by the aurora borealis of the battlefield.

I was walking with my hands stretched in

front of me and had just touched a railing; I had a sudden sensation of leaning over the balcony of hell.

What a human tempest! What an explosion of hate and destruction! One would have said that from those millions of sparks a band of giants were forging the horizon of the world, striking it with terrible blows. A great, continuous light, composed of an infinite number of fleeting gleams, shone, quivered, leaped up, dazzling earth and sky; iridescent sheaves spread out in the open heavens like the jets a pestle splashes up from a glowing smelter.

As I had just come out of the trenches, all these fireworks had meaning for me: they were requests, orders, despairing appeals, signals for slaughter; and I deciphered this blazing brazier as if it had been telling me in so many words all the fury and distress of the combatants.

In the direction of Combles, to the left of Maurepas, there was one point that burned more fiercely than all the rest. It was there that the two armies, the English and the French, joined

each other; it was there that the enemy was concentrating insistently the tumultuous effort of his fire. Every night for two whole weeks I saw the same devouring flames blaze up at this spot. At every second it was so intense that that second gave the impression of being the decisive second. But hours, nights, months advanced slowly toward eternity, and each one of these terrible instants was only one paroxysm in an infinity of paroxysms. It is just so that the pain of a wound makes us imagine we cannot endure it any longer; but Death does not yield readily to the desire of men; she strikes at her own sweet will when she wishes, where she wishes, and will not often let herself be beguiled or advised.

Morning came. Those who have watched the dawns of war, after nights spent in battle or in the bloody work of the ambulances, have experienced one of the most dreadful, one of the saddest things in the world.

As for me, I shall never forget that green and jealous light, those wan lamps, those discouraged faces of men invaded by corruption, that shiver

of morning cold, like the last icy breath of night that lingers in the benumbed foliage of great trees.

My task as stretcher-bearer was finished. I could return to my carpentering. I set to work shaping heavy pieces of green wood, while I thought of many things, such things as rise in the mind when it is deprived of slumber and steeped in bitterness.

About eight o'clock in the morning the whole population of flies saluted the sun, which was slowly disengaging itself from the mists; and these creatures began to give themselves up to their great daily orgy.

All those who were on the Somme during 1916 will retain forever the memory of the flies. The disorder of the battle-field, its richness in carrion, the abnormal accumulation of men, animals, spoiled food—all these causes brought about that year a formidable hatching of flies. . They seemed to have assembled from all points of the globe to be present at an exceptional and solemn occasion.

They were of all species, and the world of men, delivered over to their hatred, remained without defense against this loathsome invasion. During a whole summer they were the mistresses, the queens, and they did not have to bargain for their food.

At Hill 80 I saw wounds swarming with larvæ, a sight one had almost forgotten since the Battle of the Marne. I saw the flies hurl themselves upon the blood and pus of the wounds and gorge themselves with such drunken frenzy that you could seize them with your fingers or with a pair of pincers before they would consent to fly away and leave their feast. They spread all sorts of infections and gangrene. The army suffered cruelly from them, and it is really astonishing that the victory did not remain definitely with them.

There was nothing more desolate, more barren, than the plateau where the city of tents stood. Every morning heavy tractors climbed the hill of Etinehem and brought water to the camp. They filled a few scattered casks with a sweetish water, and for a whole day it was necessary to quench the

thirst of the men and to wash away all the stains and soils of illness from this supply alone.

Not a bush, as far as the clumps of trees on the horizon! Not a tuft of fresh grass! Nothing but a boundless immensity of dust or slime, according to whether the face of the sky was serene or stormy. In order to bring some color into this desolation, some one had had the idea of doing a little gardening between the tents, and the wounded who were being taken down from the ambulances noticed with astonishment, amid the dreary bustle of military matters, the pale smile of a geranium or the little Gothic cathedrals of the juniper-trees, which had been pulled up from the rocky edges of the valley and replanted there, hastily, in the usual designs of French gardens.

I cannot recall without a strange emotion the tent under which a dozen soldiers, attacked with gas-gangrene, lay dying. All about this desperate place there ran a meager flower-bed, where a diligent man was trying placidly to make the salvias unfold their red bells.

At times the earth, overwhelmed with the

August weather, swooned in the sudden gratification of a storm. On these days all the canvas of the tents flapped wildly, and they seemed like great lead-colored birds, clinging fast to the earth, the better to resist the blast.

But neither the dashing of the rain, the crashing of the thunder, nor any other furious assault of nature was able to distract these men from their task of war. On Hill 80 they continued to dress wounds and operate upon the wounded just as on the neighboring hills the artillery continued to tear up the disputed ground. Often it seemed as if man were determined to speak louder than heaven, and a sort of competition would take place between the guns and the thunder.

Once, I remember, the thunder had the last word: two sausage-balloons caught fire and the artillery, having lost its eyes, stammered for a while and then became silent.

At the end of a few days I was given carpentry-work to do in the tents, such jobs as setting up benches and shelves. I started out at once with my tools, and did my best not to disturb the pa-

tients, who were already sufficiently worn-out with the noise of the battle. I found this service a painful one, for it made me the helpless witness of every sort of misery. One day, however, I was present at a beautiful and touching scene. A young artilleryman was receiving a visit from his brother, an *aspirant* of a near-by regiment. The latter, very pale, was gazing upon the face of the wounded man, which was no longer anything but a blood-stained dressing and a glance; he had taken his hands and leaned forward, instinctively, as if to embrace him, but he drew back, only to lean forward again, a prey to mingled horror and compassion. Then the wounded man, who could not speak, had an inspiration that was full of tenderness and, disengaging his fingers, he began to stroke his brother's hair and face. This silent outpouring showed how willingly the soul renounces words when it seeks to convey its most intimate emotions.

Under the same tent Lieutenant Gambier died.

He was a simple man, rather worn, dedicated to some obscure civil employment, who by the sheer

force of his steady courage had won an officer's stripes. A hemorrhage had just exhausted his big body and it took him two days to die. The breath of life took two days to leave his clay-cold members, which were covered with large drops of clammy sweat. From time to time he would sigh. Then, leaving my center-bit and my screw, I would go and ask him if he did n't need something. He would look at me, with wide eyes full of memory and sorrow, and say:

"I don't need anything, but I 'm so wretched! Oh! I 'm so wretched!"

I was almost glad to see him die; his unceasing agony was all too plain. Little Lalau, who died the same day, at least slipped off drowned in the unconsciousness of delirium.

He was a country lad; he had been wounded in the spinal marrow by a small fragment of shell. He developed a sort of meningitis and at once ceased to belong to the rational world. The pupils of his eyes swung from right to left with a dizzy rapidity; he moved his chin ceaselessly, like an animal chewing its cud. One day I found

him devouring the rosary that the chaplain had placed about his neck. A nurse held his mouth open while we drew out a great number of fragments of wood and wire. The unfortunate fellow laughed softly, repeating: "It 's hard, it 's hard to chew!" and the lines in his face were shaken by a multitude of painful twitchings.

Delirium disconcerts, offends our souls as the supreme disorder: that is to say, of the power of judgment. But it expresses, perhaps, a kindness of nature, since it relieves the wounded man from the necessity of controlling his wretchedness. Life and death have these somber compensations. Once, for example, I saw a soldier who had been shot in so many places that the surgeons had decided his case was beyond the help of science. Among other injuries, his right wrist was transfixed by a long splinter of steel. The sight was so harrowing that they tried to pull the fragment out. A doctor had grasped it in his hand and was shaking it gently back and forth.

"Does it hurt you?" he asked, from time to time.

And the patient replied: "No; but I'm thirsty!"

"How is it possible," I asked the doctor, "how is it possible that what you are doing to him does n't cause him pain?"

"It 's because he 's in a state of shock," the doctor replied.

And I realized how the very excess of suffering at times obtains for its victims a truce which is, in a way, a foretaste of annihilation, the prelude to the happiness of death.

At the end of each of the big rectangular tents they had put up one of those little conical tents which the soldiers call *marabouts*. These served as death-chambers. It was there they shut up the men who were beyond help, in a solitude preliminary to that of the tomb. Some of them seemed to know what it meant—that soldier, for instance, who was wounded in the abdomen and who, as he was taken under the round tent, asked them to give him a change of linen.

"Don't leave me to die in a soiled shirt," he kept repeating. "Only just give a a clean one.

If you 're in a hurry, I can put it on, myself, quite well."

At times, overcome by all this suffering, I would beg for duty outside the camp, in order to let some fresh air in upon my mind and renew the tenor of my reflections. It was always with a sigh of relief that I left the city of tents behind me. From a distance I would look back upon that sinister mass, which was not without points of resemblance to a traveling circus. I would seek among the white roofs and scarlet crosses the tops of the *marabouts*. I would look at the cemetery, where hundreds upon hundreds of bodies were buried and, reckoning up the sum of all the sorrow, despair, and fury heaped up in this one spot of earth, I would think of those people who in the interior of the country fill the café-concerts, the exhibitions, the moving pictures, the brothels—shamelessly enjoying themselves, the world and the season—and, sheltered by this trembling rampart of sacrifice, refuse to share in the universal distress. It was with shame even

more than resentment that I thought of these people.

Those walks outside refreshed my heart, and I found a sort of comfort in the sight of healthy men whom the battle-field had spared.

Sometimes I went as far as the English sector. The long-distance artillery was used lavishly there. The guns were served by soldiers in their shirt-sleeves, in long trousers, smeared with oil and axle-grease, who looked much more like factory workers than military men. One realized there to what an extent war has become an industry, a mechanical and methodical enterprise for killing.

One evening, as I was passing over the Albert road, I overheard two men, seated on the edge of a ditch, talking. They had the accent of peasants from the North and probably belonged to regiments that were just coming back from the firing-line.

"In the future," said one of them, "those who want to mix in public affairs will have to be

able to show that they've had a hand in it—in this war!"

But these frank words, unimportant and unechoed, overheard in passing at night on a road at the front, were lost in the tumult of the cannonade.

I was indebted for many things to my new occupation of stretcher-bearer. I was indebted to it for the opportunity to know men better than I had known them until then; to know them under a purer light, naked before death, stripped even of those instincts which disfigure the divine beauty of simple souls. In the midst of the most difficult ordeals our race of workers has remained vigorous, pure, worthy of the noble traditions of humanity. I have known you, Rebic, Louba, Ratier, Freyssinet, Calmel, Touche, and all you others whom I cannot name if I do not wish to name the entire country. It cannot be said that the wound chooses its victims; yet when I passed between the beds where your fate was being fought out, when I looked you one by one in the face,

it seemed to me that you were all good, patient, energetic men, and that you all deserved to be loved.

Did n't you deserve it, Rebic, you gray-haired sergeant with a loving family awaiting you at home? One day they had just dressed the great wound you bore in your side, and we were crowding about you to put on your clean linen and remake your bed. You began to shed tears, good, simple man, and when we asked you the reason why, you gave this sublime answer: "I am weeping to see all the trouble I am causing you."

From Louba we could not expect words: the bursting of a shell had blown away his face. Nothing remained of it but an immense, barbarous wound, one crooked, displaced eye, and the forehead, the humble forehead of a peasant. One day, however, while we were saying some friendly words to him, Louba wished to show us his pleasure, and he gave us a smile. They will always remember it, those who saw the soul of Louba smile without a face.

Freyssinet, a boy of twenty, often gave way

to delirium; in his moments of lucidity he would realize this and ask pardon of those whom it might have disturbed. The hour came when he knew at last the majestic repose of death. That day a much bedecked personage was going about through the tents with an imposing escort. He stopped at the foot of each bed and pronounced, in a pompous voice, a few words intended to show what an honor his mere address was for the wounded man. He stopped before Freyssinet's bed and began his discourse. As he was a man of importance and method, he said his whole say without noticing the many signals that were being made in his direction. When he had finished, however, he asked his attendants: "You wished to point something out to me?"

"Yes," they replied, "it was . . . that wounded man is dead."

But Freyssinet was so modest, so timid, that the whole attitude of his corpse expressed respect and confusion.

It was there, also, that I made the acquaintance of Touche.

He came to us, poor Touche, with his head broken, sent on from a *poste de secours* that had been destroyed by fire. I saw him, with his fumbling fingers, turn upside down an old duffle bag that contained all his possessions.

"No, no," he was saying, "they are certainly lost."

"What are you looking for?" I asked him.

"I am looking for the photographs of my two little boys and my wife. It 's too bad, but they have lost them for me. I 'll never see them again."

I helped him search for them, and as I did so I became aware that Touche was blind!

Poor Touche! He knew me quite well by my voice and always had a smile ready for me. He ate with the awkwardness of a man who is not yet accustomed to his infirmity. But he liked to get out of his difficulties by himself and would say to us, in a serene voice:

"I do the best I can, you see: I search about on the plate till I know there 's nothing left."

Can I have forgotten the name of that one

they brought to us one night, with his legs crushed, who murmured simply: "It 's hard to die! Come! Come! I 'll be brave!"

And then what was the name of that artless boy who in these words bade us be careful of his foot, which had been roughly used by a grenade: "Take good care of it, messieurs, for I 'm not married yet."

But Calmel, Calmel—none of those who knew him would ever wish to forget him. Never did man more ardently desire to live. Never did man make himself more worthy of life by resignation and endurance. He was suffering from mortal wounds which his eyes, flashing with inner life, unceasingly denied. It was he who during a night bombardment, with all the authority of that dying voice of his, addressed his ward-mates and bade them be calm.

"Come, come!" he said. "We are all men here; are n't we?"

And such is the strength of the spirit that these mere words, uttered by a mouth like his, had the

power to restore order and confidence in the hearts of all.

It was to Calmel that a plump civilian, entrusted with I know not what mission to the armies, said with jubilant conviction one day:

"You seem pretty badly hurt, my brave boy! But if you knew what wounds we are causing them, with our seventy-fives! Terrible wounds, my dear man, terrible!"

Each day brought visitors to Hill 80. They arrived from Amiens in sumptuous automobiles; they chatted as they crossed the great canvas room, which looked like an agricultural exhibition; they addressed a few words to the wounded, according to the nature of their own personal business, their opinions, their station in life. They jotted down memoranda in their note-books and at times consented to sup at the officers' table. There were foreigners among them—philanthropists, politicians, ladies of the stage, millionaires, novelists, and pamphleteers. Those who were seeking strong sensations were sometimes admitted

into the conical tents or into one of the operating-rooms.

They would go away pleased with their visit when the weather was fine, and comfortably sure of having seen very unusual things, heroic warriors, a model institution.

But enough! I have pronounced your names, Freyssinet, Touche, Calmel, and they have left in my heart a memory too noble to be mingled with rancor. What has become of that deserted Hill 80? The battle moved toward the east. Winter came, the city of tents folded its canvas, like a fleet of sailing-vessels that must weigh anchor in search of new fortunes.

Often in my dreams I see again the bare plateau and the immense cemetery, stranded amid the misty plowlands, like the wreckage of a great fleet at the bottom of the sea.

III

RÉCHOUSSAT'S CHRISTMAS

RÉCHOUSSAT was repeating, with a weak and constrained laugh: "All the same, I tell you they won't come."

Corporal Têtard turned a deaf ear. He was arranging his paraphernalia on a table: the compresses, the oil, the rubber gloves which resembled slightly those of a fencer, the probes, fastened to a tube like great pods of vanilla, a basin of enameled iron that looked like an immense bean, and a receptacle of glass with a big belly and a large mouth, that looked like nothing at all.

Réchoussat assumed an air of unconcern: "They can come or not as they choose. I don't care a hang."

Corporal Têtard shrugged his shoulders and answered: "But I tell you they will come!"

The wounded man shook his head obstinately:

"Here! my poor fellow, no one comes here. All those people who come down-stairs, well, they never come up here. That 's how it is, I tell you; but I don't care a hang."

"You may be certain they will come."

" And besides, I don't know why they 've put me in this little room, all alone."

"Probably because you have to be quiet."

"Whether they come or whether they don't come, it 's all the same to me." Réchoussat knitted his brows to show his pride. Then he added, with a sigh: "You can go ahead with that stunt of yours."

As a matter of fact, Corporal Têtard was just ready. He had lighted a candle-end, and with a quick movement he pulled down the sheets of the bed.

Réchoussat's body appeared, extraordinarily thin. But Têtard paid little attention to that, and Réchoussat himself had lived for three months on fairly good terms with his illness. He knew quite well that a fragment of shell in the back is always a serious matter, and that when your

arms and legs are paralyzed you can't go on putting things off from one day to another. Nevertheless, when the probe penetrated him, he uttered that consecrated phrase which he always repeated twice a day:

"What a wretched thing it is not to be able to do this business by yourself!"

The syringe was already in place. The glass receptacle was taking on the color of muddy amber, and a strong, penetrating odor was spreading through the chamber where the dying man lived the life of a recluse.

"That relieves you?" asked Têtard.

"Yes, it 's a relief. It 's six o'clock now and they have n't come yet. Lucky thing it 's nothing to me!"

The corporal did not answer. With a bored air he was rubbing his rubber gloves one against the other. The flame of the candle, chained to its wick, leaped and strained like a poor prisoner that wanted to detach itself and rise, all by itself, in the darkness of the chamber, above that darkness, higher, still higher in the wintry sky, up

into those regions where the sounds of this war of men were no longer to be heard. The wounded man and the attendant watched the flame without speaking, their eyes wide and empty. The glass receptacle slowly uttered a little liquid murmur. From second to second, the far-off guns sent a shudder through the windows, and each time the candle flame seemed to give a nervous leap.

"Takes long. You 're not cold?" asked Têtard.

"As for the lower part of my body, I don't know what cold is."

"That will come back."

"Surely it will come back. It 's dead, but it 's got to come alive again! I 'm twenty-five years old: that 's an age when you have some vigor in your flesh!"

The corporal nodded his head, embarrassed. Réchoussat seemed to him pretty far gone: he had great sores wherever his body touched the bed, and they had put him by himself to conceal the spectacle of his slow agony from the sight of his more fortunate comrades.

A long moment passed. The silence was too heavy for the nothings they had to say. Then, as if continuing some discussion within himself, Réchoussat suddenly went on:

"Just the same, you know, it does n't take much to please me. If they had only come for two minutes!"

"Keep still!" said Têtard. "Keep still!"

He strained his ear toward the door. There was a confused noise coming down the corridor, with sudden shadows and gusts of fresh air.

"Hello! there they are!" said the attendant.

Réchoussat stretched his neck.

"Bah! I tell you it is n't so!"

All at once a supernatural light, with rich red and golden reflections, an unheard of, a fairy-like light had burst out in the corridor. The opposite wall appeared. Usually it was as gray as the thoughts of December; suddenly it had the splendor of an Oriental palace or the gown of a princess. All this light was mingled with sound, a sound of voices and laughter. One could not distinguish any one person singing, but all to-

gether the sound seemed like some great song. Réchoussat, who could not move himself, strained his neck and lifted his hands a little above the sheet, as if he wished to touch that beautiful sound and that beautiful light.

"You see, you see!" said Têtard. "I told you they 'd come."

Of a sudden everything seemed to be on fire. Something had just stopped before the door—a tree, a real fir-tree from the woods, set up in a green box. There were so many little lamps and so many pink candles on its branches that it looked like an enormous torch. The little room, like a heart that is too happy, seemed as if it would burst with all this light inside of it. And there was something more wonderful still: the Three Wise Men entered. They were Sorri, the Senegalese sharp-shooter, Moussa, and Cazin. They wore mantles of Andrinople and long white beards made with cotton and bandages.

They all entered and moved to the other end of Réchoussat's room. Sorri carried a package with a favor in it; Moussa brandished two cigars

and Cazin a bottle of champagne. All three of them saluted ceremoniously, as they had been taught to do, and Réchoussat suddenly found himself with a box of bonbons in his right hand, two cigars in his left, and a sparkling bottle on his little table. He said:

"Ah, no, boys! That 's too much! No, no, boys!"

Moussa and Cazin laughed, Sorri showed his teeth, and all the bad odor of the room was gone, as if only a little light had been needed to drive it away.

"Ah, no, boys!" repeated Réchoussat. "I don't smoke, but I 'll keep the cigars as a souvenir. Pass me the wine!"

Sorri took the bottle in both hands and presented it as if it were a sacred cup. Réchoussat drank slowly, saying:

"That 's the real stuff! What good wine!"

There were more than twenty faces at the door, and all the faces were laughing like the gentle, naïve face of Réchoussat himself.

Then followed a regular sunset. The marvel-

ous tree went off, jerkily, down the corridor. The Three Wise Men vanished, with their trailing mantles and their cotton beards. Réchoussat still held his bottle in his hand and looked at the candle as if all the lights had remained in this one. He laughed softly, as he repeated: "That surely is real wine!" Then he went on laughing a little, without saying anything.

Very softly the darkness slipped back into the room and spread itself everywhere, like a familiar animal disturbed from its customary place.

Something else, something dreary, stole back everywhere with it, the odor of Réchoussat's illness. A murmurous silence settled over everything in the room, like dust. The face of the wounded man ceased to reflect the splendor of the festive tree; he lowered his eyes, looked at the bed, at those thin, ulcerated legs which were his legs, at the glass jar full of muddy liquid, at the probe, —at all these incomprehensible things, and he said, stammering with astonishment:

"But . . . but . . . What 's the meaning of all this? What 's the meaning of all this?"

IV

LIEUTENANT DAUCHE

IT was in the month of October, 1915, that I made the acquaintance of Lieutenant Dauche.

I cannot recall that period without deep emotion. We had just passed several scorching weeks before Sapigneul: the Champagne offensive had been rumbling for a long time on our right, and its last eddies washed in upon our sector like the strayed waves of some cyclone at sea whose fury scatters itself far and wide. For three days our guns had echoed those of La Pouilleuse and we had been awaiting, our arms at our feet, an order that had not come. We had troubled, vacant minds, still reeling from that sort of intoxication of sound which results from a prolonged bombardment. We were both relieved at not having to make a deadly assault and anxious about

the reasons that had spared us the necessity of doing so.

It was then that I was wounded for the first time. Chance, the hazard of the hospital evacuations, took me to the Château de S., which is only a very commonplace adornment to the landscape, but which rises out of the midst of charming verdure and overlooks, from the side of its small hill, the delicate little valley of the Vesle.

My wound, though not serious, was painful. It gave me a slight fever and a strong desire for silence and solitude. It pleased me to live for long hours in the company of a physical suffering that I could endure but that put my patience to the test and made me reflect on the vulnerability of a constitution in which, until then, I had placed an obstinate confidence.

I had a pleasant room, decorated with hangings of Jouy and soft paintings. My bed occupied it together with that of another officer, who walked silently about the room and showed great consideration for my reserve. The day came, however, when I was allowed to take food, and on that

day we talked together, doubtless because old human traditions lead men who are dining together into conversation.

In spite of the state of mind in which I had been until then, this conversation was a pleasure to me and a resource against myself.

I was given to somber thoughts and all the sadness of the period. Lieutenant Dauche seemed to me, from the beginning, a soul full of serenity and calm happiness. Later I saw what an admirable thing it was in him to have preserved such virtues, in the midst of an unremitting adversity that had not spared him a single trial.

We were both of us originally from Lille; this was a bond between us. The falling of an inheritance, and certain business interests early in life, had led Dauche to settle in the Department of the Meuse and make his home there. He had married happily and he and his young wife had two beautiful babies. A third was about to be born when the German invasion convulsed the face of France and the whole world, ruined a prosperous business, and violently separated Dauche

from his children and his wife, of whom, since then, he had had only the most uncertain and the most disquieting news.

In the same way I, too, had left my affections and my property in the invaded country. I felt in Dauche's company the strength of that solidarity which is engendered by a common misfortune. I realized, however, that my comrade was enduring much greater misfortunes than mine and with a heart which, for all its sensitiveness, was braver than mine, as was proved to me many times.

Dauche was of a pleasing height. He had the high color and the fair hair of our part of the country. A fine beard ornamented and lengthened a face that was full of sweetness and life, such as one sees in the young men whose likenesses, with a ruff at the neck and a heavy chain of glittering gold shining over a doublet of dark velvet, have so often and so happily been represented by the Flemish painters.

A small bandage encircled his forehead. He seemed so little troubled by it that I neglected for some time to ask him about his wound. But,

then, he himself thought nothing of it. On one occasion I saw his bandage changed, and he then explained to me, in a few words, how in a surprise attack a fragment of a grenade had struck him. He appeared to treat this incident with the most complete indifference.

"There is nothing to take me to the interior," he added, with a melancholy smile, "and I was planning to return at once to my company; but the doctor has thought best formally to oppose my doing so."

He confessed it was not without pleasure that he looked forward to completing his convalescence in this Château de S., which was taking on the splendid apparel of autumn.

After the second week and in spite of the gravity of my wound, which was in the shoulder, I was able to get up and take a few steps. Dauche helped me with a brotherly kindness, and it was thanks to his encouragement that I soon ventured into the avenues of the park.

"You are going out with Lieutenant Dauche?" the doctor, who took care of us both, said to me

with some embarrassment. "Be careful not to go too far."

This doctor was a silent man. I did not ask him for more enlightenment: I had confidence in my newly found strength and by a natural enough turn of the mind I assumed it was I who was the object of his professional solicitude.

Several days passed, days overflowing with all that ardor and eternal youth that attend the birth of a friendship. The war, among a thousand other miseries, has made us experience that of living in the company of men whom in times of peace we should have carefully avoided. So it was with a trembling joy that I recognized in Dauche those qualities which my nature, perhaps unreasonably troubled and hard to please, requires in order to feel affection. I believe there is a deep predestination in this: the men of to-day who can become my friends are, all over the world, stamped, marked with the same mysterious sign; but I shall not know them all and fate will never perhaps take the trouble to let me meet my best friend.

The hours when it did not rain I passed in long

conversations with Dauche on the slopes of the hill, down which straggled a luxuriant grove of beeches and oaks. My young friend saw and judged the things of nature with a candor mingled with an originality and an ingenuousness such as one seldom encounters except in children. He spoke of his scattered household with a tenacious faith and he greeted the future with that smiling gravity one usually sees only in men unbalanced by religion or intoxicated by glory and success.

In the evening, when the approach of darkness inclines one to look back with a pitiless glance upon circumstances and upon oneself, he would gaily invite me to try my hand at checkers, and this seductive game would lead us to the threshold of sleep.

The pleasure it gave me to be with Dauche led me one day, in the presence of the doctor, into a discreet little eulogy of his character.

This doctor, a man who had reached the end of his youth, tall, bald and stooping, had in his

face, which was overspread by a straggling beard, a somber expression that was full of a timid goodness.

"Fate," I said, "does not choose its victims. It 's a great pity that it should attack such generous natures, but marvelous that it should n't succeed in altering them more."

We were talking as we walked slowly along a narrow road, deep among hazel thickets.

My companion gave a curious shrug of his shoulders and threw a glance all about him, as if to assure himself that we were alone.

"You seem," he said, "to take a great deal of pleasure in the company of Monsieur Dauche, and that is quite natural. Just the same, I have already begged you not to extend your walks together too far from the neighborhood of the château, and I must repeat this advice to you."

The tone in which these words were uttered suddenly filled me with a sort of anguish, and I did not hide my astonishment.

"Dauche," I said, "seems to me to be having a

very peaceful convalescence. Do you fear anything from that scratch on his forehead?"

The doctor had stopped. With the point of his shoe he was busily scraping one of the stones in the road, and he did not raise his head.

"That scratch," he said very rapidly, "is a far more serious wound than you would believe."

A painful silence followed and, as I stood there stupidly, the doctor continued, with many hesitations and much reserve:

"We are beginning to know all about these wounds in the head. Your comrade does not know and must not know the gravity of his condition. He does not even know that the projectile which struck him has not been extracted. And even if the thing were possible. . . ."

Then suddenly the doctor rambled off into philosophical considerations that seemed to come at once easily and hesitantly, as if he were in a labyrinth that was familiar to him:

"We have done a great deal, a great deal. We have even brought the dead back to life; but we

cannot bring all the dead back to life. There have been some very difficult problems. We think we have solved them; but there are some problems that cannot be solved. I 'm not speaking of God. The very idea of God seems to be something apart from the great catastrophe. I 'm speaking not of God but of men. They must be told things very simply: there are some wounds that we cannot heal; when people stop making such wounds, the problem will no longer exist. That is one solution; but the men of my profession are too full of pride to suggest it to the world, and the world is too mad to listen to it."

I had enough respect for these digressions not to interrupt their course; however, when silence fell again I murmured in a low voice:

"Really, you say that this projectile—"

"It is inaccessible, you understand, Monsieur? Inaccessible! It is rather shameful for a man who is full of vanity to have to confess such things, but that at least is honest. And besides, it 's a fact. Man has placed it where it is; he is powerless to get it out again."

I felt troubled by the personality of my companion, and above all I was very much disturbed by his words. I stammered:

"However, it 's possible to live with that—"

"No," he answered in a heavy voice, "there is nothing to do but to die."

We walked as far as the border of the wood. The bright light over the damp meadows seemed to recall the doctor to the formalities of his professional etiquette, for he said in a changed voice:

"Excuse me, Monsieur, for having forced upon you considerations that must naturally remain foreign to your personal way of looking at things. I am not sorry to have had the chance to speak to you about Dauche just now. He has not, I believe, any near relatives in the free part of France. You are interested in him; it is my duty, therefore, to warn you: he is a lost man. I will even add, since you seek his companionship, that at any moment there may appear symptoms that will rapidly prove fatal."

I had know Dauche for only a short time, but I felt overwhelmed. A few meaningless words

came to my lips. I said, perhaps, something like, "It 's terrible!" But the doctor concluded his meditation with a colorless smile:

"Alas, Monsieur! you will do as I and as many others have done: you will grow accustomed to live in the company of men who still share our universe, but whom we know unquestionably to be already dead."

I could not grow accustomed to anything of the sort. This conversation took place late one morning. I spent the rest of the day avoiding the sight of Dauche, a bit of cowardice the cause of which lay in my clumsiness in concealing my thoughts.

The night found me unable to sleep, but it was doubly welcome, for it provided me with the time to conquer my impressions and also gave me an appearance that made it very proper for me to blame my illness for the change in my behavior.

As I was getting out of bed, Dauche proposed that we should take a walk together through the woods. I was about to refuse; but his smile was

so cordial, so brotherly, that I had not the courage to use my fatigue as an excuse. Besides, the weather was radiant.

The splendor of the hot, still sunshine, the delicate colors of a landscape swathed in the mists of early morning, perhaps, also, some personal need for happiness and forgetfulness—all these things abruptly turned my thoughts away from that sort of abyss into which I had seen them plunged.

Dauche began to run through the high golden grass, which was slowly withering. You would have said his laughter was that of a boy. He imitated, with all sorts of anecdotes and phrases, the games of his own children and he stopped suddenly, full of a tender gravity, to speak of the one he had not yet seen and of the wife who was awaiting him in exile.

Nothing in nature seemed to him contemptible or unworthy of interest. He breathed in the fragrance of all the flowers, and had an eye for every object, crushed the aromatic herbs between his hands, tasted the blackberries and the nuts in

the thickets. He pointed out to me a thousand things that I blushed never to have noticed before. After that he dragged me through an interminable adventure in speculation, where I was able to follow him only with a grumbling awkwardness, like an old man whirled away in a dance.

We were coming back to the château, very proud of our appetites and of the speed with which the hours had passed, when, at the turn of a path, the words and advice of the doctor rose suddenly from the depths of my soul. It was like the little rap of a finger, brief and imperious, on a door. I realized, then, that in a dull sort of way I had never ceased to think of them. But as I looked once more at Dauche, who seemed like a fair, ripe ear of corn in the beauty of the midday, I shook my head and concluded: "That honorable doctor is mistaken."

And during that day I remained happy.

The next morning, as I was taking my time about getting up, and dreamily counting the dancing flowers on the hangings, I caught the meas-

ured breathing of Dauche, who was still asleep. At once a voice said in my ear: "That man over there is going to die."

Then a desire seized me to get away, to escape from Dauche and from that château, to plunge into the din and confusion that reigned in the interior of the country.

I had lost all thought of sleep and I began to reason with a cold lucidity. To put it briefly: I had known this charming man only for a short time, and there was nothing I could do for him. He was in the hands of skilful doctors who would exhaust for his benefit all the resources of their art. I could forget his unhappy fate, all the more justifiably because at this very moment it was shared by a great many human beings who were young and worthy of interest. My presence could be no help to him, and being with him constantly would, on the contrary, contribute to depress the moral strength of which I still stood in great need.

As a result of all these considerations, that very morning, when I found myself alone with our

doctor, I begged him on some pretext to hasten my evacuation to another hospital.

"I see no objection to that," he said, "considering the state of your wound. It shall be as you desire."

This immediate assent was a relief and somewhat of a surprise. But when my eyes met those of the doctor, I found in his a sad and troubled expression that made me ashamed.

In fact, I was so disturbed by my weakness that at the end of a quarter of an hour I went to find the doctor and asked him if it was possible to change my plan and complete my cure at the Château de S.

He smiled with an odd air of satisfaction and assured me that I could remain as long as it suited me.

Coming after so much indecision, my resolution brought me peace. I passed the greater part of the day in my room and found some distraction in reading. Toward evening a comrade who had lost an arm at Berry-au-Bac came very se-

cretly to find us and led us to the orangery, where two musicians from a neighboring regiment were giving a concert.

I had a great love for music, while at tne same time failing to perceive in it any exact intellectual significance. The fact is, I had not till then been in a position to discover with what authority a sequence of sounds and harmonies can convert to its own use the state of our souls and precipitate our emotions.

A violin, accompanied by a piano, was playing one of Bach's sonatas. They suddenly swung into an adagio that was full of poignant majesty. Several times I felt as if some person, invisible and unknown, placed a hand on my arm and murmured: "How, how is it possible for you to forget that he is going to die?"

I got up as the concert was drawing to a close and fled, the prey of a genuine torment.

"What on earth 's the matter with you?" asked Dauche, who had come out after me. "You seem ill or unhappy."

"Both," I answered, in a voice that I could control no longer. "Did n't you hear what that violin was playing?"

"Of course," he said, dreamily, "nothing could have been more purely joyous."

I looked at him furtively, but I could make nothing of it. Only that evening, alone in the darkness with my thoughts, did I understand that fate had reserved for me a singular share in the destiny of my friend: Dauche was condemned; he must die; he was going to die; but another than he was in a sense charged to endure his agony.

I deny that I am made differently from most men. The war has tried me severely without upsetting my imagination, and my wound was not one of those that alter the normal functionings of an ordinary, healthy spirit.

Consequently, I feel quite sure that the nervous ordeal I went through from that day forward would have overwhelmed in the same way any man who had been unexpectedly caught by the same mischance.

Despite the sinister experiences of the battlefield, I was to have a new experience of death, one that was terrible by its very length. It is hardly possible to live without being able to conceive every moment what the next moment will be like, and it is a tragic thing to carry within yourself a certainty that freezes every project, every intention at the very outset. Illness creates situations like this in everyday life; but their sadness is tempered by hope, even by one's increasing habit of giving things up. I owe to the war the knowledge of a new anguish—that of living beside a human being whom I knew, in spite of his strength and beauty, to be living under the threat of a terrible doom, and who had no future save that which hope and ignorance gave him.

This ignorance of our own selves is a very precious thing and makes us envy the complete unconsciousness of animals and plants. It enabled Dauche to live joyously on the very edge of the abyss. I was there to take upon myself everything dramatic in the situation, just as if it had

been against the order of nature for so great a tragedy to remain unexperienced.

The first days of November had come. Autumn was fading in all its magnificence. We had not given up our walks. I found that I was even driven to them, in spite of myself, as if the whole spectacle of the dying year were particularly suited to express, to the point of satiation, the bitter poignancy of our friendship.

We often climbed the hill that overlooked the plain of Rheims. The fury of the war seemed, like the sap of the vegetation, to be cooling little by little and retreating underground. The guns grumbled lazily and wearily; the leafless woods revealed the military works that they had hidden all summer under their foliage.

The autumn made me feel even more keenly the fate of Dauche, who in turn revealed to me still more cruelly the fate of all things. The idea that this man was going to die so tainted my thoughts that it destroyed all their stability, all their courage, all their efficacy. Indeed, the impotence of man was about the only thing that seemed cer-

tain to me, as I contemplated the thin lines of the poplars, lighted up with their fugitive glory.

And then it became almost impossible for me to look at anything without thinking at the same time: "He will never see it again."

There is a terrible page in Saint-Simon about the death of Louis XIV. The historian cannot relate any of the actions of the dying monarch without repeating, with an obstinacy that is tinged with hatred, "And it was for the last time."

In the same way I would think, twenty times a day, as I watched my friend enjoying the beauties of the season, "So it is for the last time!" But there was nothing in my heart save a sorrowful pity.

After long hours on our hilltop we would be making up our minds to return, when in the direction of the battle-field the gleam of the first rockets would light up the twilight with their pale constellations.

Dauche seemed tranquil, light-hearted, and almost happy, like a man to whom hope returns

every minute. He would make plans. That seemed unendurable to me, and I came so near to being irritated that I said to him once:

"You are very fortunate to be brave enough to make plans at such a time."

The words were very general, very vague; yet they seemed to me at once barbarous and spiteful. I was wondering how I could take them back, when Dauche answered:

"Is n't it making a plan merely to let your heart beat? Besides, you must defy the future if you do not wish to be driven to fearing it."

These words, which were full of wisdom, troubled me without consoling me. I was assailed by a new anxiety: had Dauche any idea of his real condition?

The burden of my secret made me so acutely sensitive that for several days this question tormented me.

To-day, when I scrutinize my memories amid the broad and yet detailed perspective that time has given me, I am able to say positively that Dauche was indeed ignorant of the blow that

menaced him. In truth, I never really surprised anything whatever that allowed me to suppose he felt the least disquietude about himself. I cannot recall any words, any allusion, any faltering on his part, expressions which could not have failed to escape him if he had known the truth, and which would have revealed to me the extent of his knowledge.

On one other occasion, however, I was seized with doubt. A member of my regiment, mortally wounded in one of those many little engagements which have made Hill 108 the ever-bleeding wound of that sector, was brought in dying. We went to see him on his death-bed, and I was eager to get Dauche away at once from this chamber, where he seemed to linger.

"Perhaps that man there is happier, after all," I said, to break a tense silence.

"Do you think so? Do you think so?" the young man answered.

Some obscure force that was not chance made us look deep into each other's eyes, and in that clear gaze of my friend I saw a quiver, some-

thing furtive, terrified, like the sinking of a wrecked ship on a lonely ocean.

I made an effort to change the conversation, and I succeeded. With several deep breaths Dauche seemed to turn back toward life, and before long he was laughing, a laughter in which I could not detect any false notes.

So, in spite of this alarm, I could not help concluding that Dauche did not suspect anything. What I had seen in his eyes that day I might have surprised in any human glance. Besides, the flesh knows things of which the soul is ignorant, and this fleeting agony in the depths of his eyes was perhaps like one of those dumb cries of the brute in us which the consciousness allows to pass without either inspiring or recognizing them.

Dauche's wound was completely healed. Mine needed very little care. But I was not in the least interested in all this. I was waiting.

I realized this perfectly when Dauche asked me one day why I stayed so long in the army zone. I made up a reply in which I dwelt on

our genuine friendship and the slightness of the ties that bound me to the interior. But when I examined my heart, I saw only too clearly the real reason for my long stay at S. I was waiting for something.

The affection I felt for Dauche had not ceased to grow, in spite of all these vicissitudes. My pity for him had added to it, and the certainty that a near death awaited him had helped to exalt it not a little. With a natural leaning toward affection, I yielded myself unreservedly to a passion of devotion. I began to experience all the apprehensions of women who care for a sick child and who interpret with despair all the slightest signs, the least really alarming incidents.

There was a tennis-court in the park where a set of moldy ninepins had been set up. Dauche used often to bombard them with worn old balls which were rotting away with the dampness. One morning, as he threw one of these balls, it crumbled in his fingers, upsetting his balance and making him stumble. He lifted his hand to his forehead and I had the impression that he stag-

gered. At once I was beside him and caught him in my arms.

"What in the world 's the matter with you?" he exclaimed, as he saw my distorted face.

"I thought your head was hurting you."

"No, indeed," he replied, smiling. "I was re-adjusting my bandage."

Another time, when I let slip a book which I was absent-mindedly turning over, he stooped down, with his usual promptness, to pick it up. It struck me that he hesitated a moment before straightening himself, as if he were struggling with a sort of vertigo. I leaned over at once and took the book from his hands. His eyes were veiled in a faint red mist. Perhaps that was merely an effect of my imagination, for it passed almost instantly.

"I forbid you," I said, painfully attempting to joke, "I forbid you to abandon your rôle of convalescent."

He looked at me with an air of astonishment, and answered:

"You don't want me to think I 'm ill, do you?"

This answer made me realize how clumsy I had been, and I saw clearly that I must school myself to hide the anxiety I could not help feeling.

From that time on it never ceased to torment me. I watched everything my friend ate or drank, not daring to give him advice and yet burning to speak my mind.

I hunted up and read secretly articles on medicine that were much more calculated to confuse than to instruct me. I formed and rejected a thousand resolutions, made and unmade a thousand plans that would have been ridiculous or even comic if the fragrance of death had not impregnated and sanctified them all.

At night I would awake with a start and listen to the breathing of my companion, convinced at the least pause, at the least change of rhythm, that he was going to die, that he was dead.

We had not given up our walks, but I had abruptly shortened them, without advancing any reason. I would invent a thousand detours to avoid a slippery or rocky road; I would push the branches away from the path with a solicitude

which I was not able to keep quite natural. I would notice that we were far from the village and I would be seized with an overpowering terror that made me silent and stupid.

I had given up the game of chess, offering as an excuse my own fatigue, which before long ceased to be a mere pretense. The time came when all these emotions had a bad effect upon my health. I was in bed for several days without being able to get any rest. I would have preferred absolute solitude, but the thought that Dauche might go off by himself and do something imprudent was intolerable to me. Yet I believed that no fatal accident could take place in my absence, inasmuch as I was waiting.

So he stayed by my side and read aloud to me, to amuse me. I wished continually to stop him, and since I could say nothing of my anxiety on his behalf I complained of my own head. Incredible though it seems, I appeared to be the man who had been prostrated and he the man in full possession of his strength. As I have already said, I was suffering in his stead the bitterness of death.

One night, during his first sleep, he gave a curious animal moan, so strange that I was instantly on my feet and went and looked at him a long time by the glimmer of the night-light.

With the emotion which I experienced that evening there was mingled something like an intense desire for deliverance. And I discovered with horror that my sick soul was not merely awaiting the inevitable but actually desiring it.

I was up again at the beginning of December, and our first walk was through the pine woods that cover the sandy hilltops to the south of the highway from Rheims to Soissons.

It was toward the end of the afternoon. A fierce wind swept wailing down the old, war-ridden valley, which from the days of antiquity the ebb and flow of invasions had never ceased to ravage.

We walked, slightly chilled, close together and silent, given over, no doubt, to those vague thoughts which cannot be put into words and which are of the very color and tissue of the soul.

A ridge of the hill sheltered and warmed us,

and when we reached the top I suggested that we rest on the glossy stump of a beech, a bole that secreted a blood-like sap of an ocherous purple color.

I was tired. I was at the end of all desire, of all courage, indifferent to my actions, to my steps, in fact, exactly in the state of a man who has ceased to strive and gives up an agonizing struggle.

Is it really possible that such close unions can exist between two beings? Was it really I who abandoned the struggle that day?

Overcome with sadness, I had risen mechanically and was watching, without seeing them, the hills, thickly covered with trees, that fled away toward the horizon.

Was it actually an unusual sound that made me turn; was it not, rather, a shock, a rending of something within? Whatever it was, suddenly I knew that something was going on behind me. Then my heart began to beat madly, for it could be nothing but that terrifying and expected event.

And that it was.

Dauche had slipped down from the tree-trunk. I hardly recognized him: his whole body shook with a hideous, inhuman trembling, such as one sees in animals that have been struck down with the mallet at the slaughter-house. His hands and feet were twitching as if in a convulsive struggle. His purple face was twisted toward his right shoulder. His mouth dribbled and his eyes showed only their whites.

When I recall that sight I feel a sort of shame. I had often seen death, and the war had made me live in a horrible intimacy with it, but I had never seen anything so ugly or so bestial. I began to tremble in my turn, as if the shudder of the sick man were contagious, and my feeling of despair and disgust grew even greater.

This lasted an interminable time, during which I did not make a gesture. I let death have its way and waited until it had achieved its task. At last I slowly gathered the impression that it was stopping to breathe and loosing its victim.

Dauche's body was stiff but inert. A feeble moaning came from his lips.

At the same moment I escaped from my trance, and in spite of the disorder of my mind I set about carrying what had once been my friend away from that spot.

In order to raise him up, I made an effort that cost me great pain. He was drawn together and frightfully heavy. I had thrown my arms about his waist and I carried him breast to breast, as one carries a sleeping child. Little by little he relaxed and grew limp. A thread of foamy saliva slipped from the corner of his mouth as it does with oxen at labor. His head began to sway heavily.

Night was falling. I had to put my burden down after a few steps and then take it up again. From the body came an inarticulate and pitiful lamentation. My wounded shoulder caused me many a sharp pain. But my mind was distracted and my movements almost unconscious.

I don't know how I managed to get within sight of the château. As I reached the foot of the hill, at a turn of the avenue, I suddenly came upon the doctor, who was taking a solitary walk. It was

almost dark; I did not see the expression of his face, and I don't even remember what he said to me.

I laid the body on the ground, knelt beside it, my face streaming with sweat, and said: "There he is." Then I began to weep.

There were cries, calls, lights. They carried away the body of Dauche, and they carried me away also.

Dauche did not actually die until two days later. I did not wish to see him again. They had placed me in a distant room where I remained in a semi-delirium, asking from hour to hour: "Is it finished? Is it really finished?"

As a matter of fact, I was aware of his end before they told me of it, and I let myself slip into a black, dreamless sleep, of which I have retained, however, the most distressing memory.

It seems that Dauche was buried in the little cemetery, shut in by limbs of birches and dead fir-trees, which one sees from the village of C., in a barren field of white sand. I could not make

up my mind to go and visit him there. I bore within myself a tomb that was deeper and more actual.

I left the Château de S. toward the middle of December. I had grown weak and thin, full of lassitude at the thought that I must still pursue my own life, still struggle for my life and my death.

V

THE PROJECTS OF COUSIN

WHENEVER I had a moment of liberty, I used to go and sit down on the foot of Cousin's bed. He would say to me:

"Good, there 's room for you now they 've cut off my leg. One might say it had been done on purpose."

What a young, delicate face this man of forty had! On "barber's days," when the razor had gone around, it was pleasant to look at that perpetual, confident smile of Cousin's. It was a supernatural smile, a little shrewd, a little ironical, frank in a way, somewhat irritated, the smile of the race itself,—made with lips that were faded from loss of blood, with features drawn by a strain that had lasted too long and been too great. In spite of all, Cousin kept his confident air—confident, having no doubts about the world

in general and sure of himself just because he was alive, because he was Cousin.

One leg remained to him which, to speak frankly, was good for nothing at all. The knee-joint had been very deeply wounded by a splinter from a torpedo. It was n't doing well and people spoke of it in a low voice, with shakings of the head.

But rubbish! Cousin's confidence did n't lie particularly in his leg. He had already parted with one; he did n't seem to pay much attention to its companion. Cousin's confidence, I believe, did n't lie in any precise part of his chest, his head, or his members. With a leg more or less he remained himself, and from his light-green eyes issued a courageous flame that was not of the look only, but came from his very soul.

Whenever I sat down on his bed Cousin would tell me about his little affairs. He always carried the events up to the point where the war had interrupted them, and he had a natural tendency to unite the beautiful past of peace with a not less delicious future. Over the troubled and

bloody abyss he loved to prolong the life of other days into the life that was coming. Never verbs in the imperfect tense, but an eternal and miraculous present!

"I am an agent for *objets d'art*," he told me. "It 's a profitable trade when you really understand it. I specialize in chandeliers and hanging lamps. I work with Cohen and Company, with Marguillé, with Smithson, with all the great houses. Now, I have a particular way of working: I keep my customer for myself and I take pains to make him understand what he wants and to knock it down for him. Let 's suppose that I have here a certain Monsieur Barnabé, who has just asked me for a drawing-room luster. I say, 'Good, I see what you need,' and I jump into a taxi. I go to Cohen and Company. 'Take twenty-five for one hundred? That a bargain?' We 'll say that Cohen makes difficulties. Good! I run down the staircase, jump into the taxi again, and we spin to Smithson's. I have to admit that there are expenses: suppose that Barnabé refuses, well, there I am stuck with my taxi on my back.

But it 's interesting! It 's a trade that keeps you running, amuses you, requires taste."

I would begin to smile, myself, as I watched Cousin's animated face. He had in his cheeks two white streaks that were "not quite right"; he had, too, the slightly swollen eyes of a man who has been lying too long in bed with fever, and who is "not quite sound inside the body." At forty, however young the spirit feels itself, the flesh does not receive as kindly as at twenty splinters from torpedoes. So I watched Cousin's face with amazement, while this man whose leg had been amputated explained to me how, in his trade, one clambers up to Cohen's, takes a leap to Marguillés, tumbles down-stairs at Smithson's.

A day came when Cousin's leg began to bleed. The blood percolated through the dressings in drops that grew larger and larger, like a scarlet sweat, like the morning dew on cabbage leaves. For four or five days Cousin bled almost every day. Each time he was carried off hastily; they stuffed all sorts of things into the wound and the blood stopped flowing. Each time Cousin came

back to his bed a little paler, and said to me on his way by: "You see? You can never have any peace with little affairs like this going on."

One morning I went to sit beside Cousin, who was making his toilet. He was out of breath. In spite of his swollen face he looked emaciated, shrunken, consumed by some illness within. Actually, he made me think of a piece of fruit fretted by insects.

"I have some good news about my boys," he said to me. "Twelve and thirteen years old! Shooting up! And think how they 're going to help me in my business! I have n't told you? I 'm thinking of taking on ornamental clocks and chimney-pieces, beside chandeliers. With the trade I have I 'm going to make some stunning deals. You must always see things in a big way. By George! it will make me hustle; but I 'll arrange it, I 'll arrange it! The thing that 's necessary is to know the styles."

Unable to suppress a pang in my heart, I tried to smile. It was as if Cousin were lifted up by a lyric enthusiasm. With one hand he brandished

his towel, with the other his soap. He was describing his beautiful future to me like a man who saw it spread out, written in big letters on the white expanse of his bedclothes.

On the coverlet, at which I was looking intently, suddenly appeared a spot, a red spot that rapidly grew larger, a spot terrifyingly bright.

"Come, now," murmured Cousin, "there it is, bleeding again! You 're never left in peace!"

I went for help. They wrapped Cousin's thigh with a rubber band, while he remarked: "Gently, gently! Don't get excited!"

He said this in a voice that was grave but feeble, a voice that came from the lips alone.

The blood stopped flowing and they carried Cousin once more to the operating-table.

There he had a moment of calm. The surgeons were washing their hands. I heard them talking in low voices about Cousin's case, and it made my heart throb and my tongue turn dry in my mouth.

Cousin saw me at a distance and made me a lit-

tle sign with his eyelids. I came over to him. He said to me:

"One can never have any peace! Ah! what was I telling you then? Yes, I was speaking to you about styles. My strong point is just that, I know the styles: the Louis Fifteenth, the Empire, the Dutch, the modern, all of them. Only, it 's difficult. I 'll explain to you —"

"You must go to sleep, Cousin," the surgeon said, gently.

Cousin looked at the mask as at an old acquaintance, and he still took the time to say to me:

"I 'll explain it to you when these gentlemen have finished with me, when I 'm awake again."

Then, with composure, he began to breathe the ether.

More than a year has gone by since then. I often think, Cousin, of those explanations you did not give me, those explanations you will never give me.

VI

THE LADY IN GREEN

I CAN hardly say why I liked Rabot.

Every morning, going and coming in the room about my duties, I perceived Rabot, or rather Rabot's head and, less plainly, Rabot's eye, concealing itself among the tumbled bedclothes. He had a little the air of a guinea-pig hiding under its straw and watching you anxiously.

Each time, in passing, I made Rabot a familiar sign that consisted in energetically closing my left eye and pursing my lips. At once Rabot's eye closed, digging a thousand wrinkles in that withered invalid's face of his, and that was all: we had exchanged our salutations and our confidences.

Rabot never laughed. He had been brought up as a charity child and one surmised that he had never had enough milk when he was little; you never make up for it if those early meals have been too scanty.

Rabot was red-headed, with a sallow complexion bespattered with freckles. His head was so small that he resembled at once a rabbit and a bird. When any stranger addressed a word to him, his lower lip began to tremble and his chin rumpled up like a walnut. We had to explain to him at first that no one was going to strike him.

Poor Rabot! I don't know what I would have given to see him laugh! As it was, everything conspired to make him weep. He had fearful, interminable dressings, repeated every day for months; he was compelled to remain motionless, which prevented him from playing with his comrades; and then, besides, he did n't know how to play anything and was n't very much interested in anything.

I was, I think, the only one to reach any sort of intimacy with him; and, as I have said, this consisted mainly of winking my left eye whenever I passed within reach of his bed.

Rabot did not smoke. Whenever the cigarettes were distributed, he took his share and played

with them a moment, moving his big, thin fingers which had lost their shape from lying in bed. The fingers of a sick laborer are not beautiful; when they have lost their hardness and robustness they no longer look like anything at all.

I believe that Rabot would have liked to offer his good cigarettes to his neighbors; but it's so difficult to speak, above all to give somebody something. So the cigarettes became covered with dust on the little board, and Rabot remained stretched out on his back, quite thin and straight, like a straw swept away by the torrent of the war, not understanding anything of what was going on.

One day an officer of the general staff entered the ward and approached Rabot.

"Is it this one here?" he said. "Good! I've come to bring him the military medal and the war-cross."

He gave Rabot a little paper to sign and left him face to face with the trinkets. Rabot did not smile. He placed the box in front of him on the coverlet and gazed at it from nine o'clock in the morning till three in the afternoon.

At three o'clock the officer came back and said:

"I was mistaken; there has been an error. They were not for Rabot, these decorations, they were for Raboux."

Then he took back the medal-case, tore up the receipt, and went on.

Rabot wept from three o'clock in the afternoon till nine in the evening, the hour at which he settled down for sleep. The next day he began to weep again, the first thing in the morning. M. Gassin, who is a good chief, went off to the General Staff and came back with a medal and a cross exactly like the others; he even gave Rabot a new paper to sign.

Rabot stopped crying. A shadow remained on his face, however—a shadow that betrayed a lack of confidence, as if he feared that one day or another they would come and take his trinkets away from him again.

Several weeks went by. I often glanced at Rabot's face, and I tried to imagine what a smile would make it look like. I hoped in vain; it was evident that Rabot did not know how to

smile, that his face was n't made for such things.

It was then that the lady in green appeared.

She entered one fine morning, by one of the doors, like anybody else. But she was n't like anybody else: she had the air of an angel, a queen, a doll. She was not dressed like the nurses who worked in the wards, nor like the mothers and the wives who came to visit their sons or their husbands when they were wounded. She did n't even look like one of the ladies one meets in the street. She was much more beautiful, much more majestic. She made me think rather of those fairies, those splendid images you see on great colored calendars, beneath which the artist has written, "Reverie," or "Melancholy," or, more often, "Poetry."

She was surrounded by handsome, well-dressed officers, who seemed very attentive to her least words and were showering upon her the liveliest signs of admiration.

"Come in, Madame," one of them said to her, "since you wish to see some of the wounded."

She took two steps into the ward, stopped sud-

denly, and said in a deep voice, "The poor fellows!"

Every one in the ward pricked up his ears and opened his eyes. Mery laid down his pipe; Tarrissant shifted his crutches, with him a sign of emotion; Domenge and Burnier stopped playing cards and glued their hands against their stomachs least any one should see them inadvertently. Poupot did not move, because he is paralyzed; but one could see plainly that he was listening with all his might.

The lady in green walked first up to Sorri, the negro.

"Your name is Sorri?" she said, consulting the label.

The black man nodded his head. The lady in green continued, in a tone as sweet and melodious as that of the ladies who play in the theater:

"You have come to fight in France, Sorri, and you have left behind your beautiful land, the cool, fragrant oasis in the fiery desert of sand. Ah! Sorri! How beautiful are those African evenings when the young women appear along the

palm-tree walk, like somber statues, bearing on their heads aromatic pitchers filled with honey and the milk of the cocoa."

The officers emitted a charmed murmur, and Sorri, who understands French, uttered, as he wagged his head, the word, "Cocoa . . . cocoa."

Then the lady in green glided on over the pavement. She came to Rabot and perched calmly at the foot of his bed, like a swallow on a telegraph-wire.

"Rabot," she said, "you are a brave man!"

Rabot did not reply, but in his usual fashion, he shut his eyes tight, like a child who is afraid he is going to be slapped.

"Ah, Rabot!" said the lady in green, "what recognition ought we not to give you, you men who preserve unimpaired for us our sweet France! But, Rabot, you know already the greatest recompense of all: Glory! The rapturous ardor of combat! The exquisite anguish of bounding forward with bayonet glittering in the sun; the voluptuous delight of plunging the avenging steel in the bleeding flank of the enemy; and then the suffering,

divine because it is endured for all; the holy wound which of a hero makes a god! Ah! what beautiful memories, Rabot!"

The lady in green was still, and a religious silence reigned in the ward.

And then occurred something altogether unexpected. Rabot ceased to resemble himself. All his features drew together, violently agitated in a manner that was almost tragic. A hoarse voice issued in jerks from his skeleton-like chest, and all the world could see that Rabot was laughing.

He laughed for more than three-quarters of an hour. The lady in green had long since left and Rabot was still laughing, by fits, as if he were coughing his last cough, as if he were in the throes of death.

After that it was as if something had changed in Rabot's life. When he was on the point of weeping and felt pain, one could always make him forget it and extort a little smile from him by saying in time: "Rabot! They're going to send for the lady in green."

VII

IN THE VINEYARD

FROM Epernay to Château-Thierry the Marne flows delightfully between the graceful hills, covered with vineyards and orchards, crowned with verdure like rural goddesses, adorned with all those riches of vegetation which give to the land of France its preciousness, its nobility, its beauty.

It is the valley of repose. Jaulgonne, Dormans, Châtillon, Œuilly, Port-à-Binson, smiling old villages, may you be blessed for the hours of forgetfulness that you lavished, like a spring of gushing water, upon the exhausted troops who from Verdun came back toward the sectors, calm till of late, of the Aisne.

During the summer of 1916 the —— Army Corps was concentrated once more on the Marne,

before going to take its sanguinary part in the great sacrifice of the Somme. Our battalion was awaiting without impatience the order to set out, while we counted from the hilltops the convoys that panted for breath in the bottom of the valley, and gave ourselves over, as the way is, to all sorts of reflections.

With a few of our comrades we passed the greater part of our days among the fields, without thinking too much, full of the delight of animal indolence, far from the murderous din of the line.

There had been a few days of glistening heat; then a storm had come, with a roaring sky, a tumbling of angry clouds, a great wind charged by turns with dust and mist.

Toward the close of a certain afternoon we found ourselves on the road which rises gently from Chavenay toward the groves of the South.

There were three of us. The conversation languished. Unawares, we were returning to our own private thoughts, which we found were full of pain; and the mounting road seemed to make us, step by step, more heavy-hearted still.

"Let 's sit down on the bank," said a weary voice.

Without having taken the trouble to reply, we found ourselves suddenly lying among the clumps of silverweed; we pulled at it with heedless hands like people who occupy their muscles in order to dream with a freer soul.

One little vine began at our feet and reached in two graceful folds over a hummock of earth sparkling with dampness and wet grasses. It was a pretty little grape-vine, clean, swelling with sap, as well cared for as if it were something holy. There were no weeds, nothing but the thick vine-stalks and the earth, that opulent earth which the rains swept away and which every season the peasants brought up again in full baskets, on their backs, to the summits of the hills.

From the midst of this harmonious verdure we saw suddenly rising up a thin old woman, with a weather-beaten face and white hair all in disorder. In one hand she was holding a bucket full of ashes, with the other throwing handfuls of this dust about the roots of the vines.

Seeing us, she interrupted her labor, restored with a powdery finger a lock of hair which the wind was teasing, and looked at us fixedly. Then she spoke:

"What regiment do you belong to, you men?"

"The one hundred and tenth of the line, Madame."

"My boys did n't belong to that regiment."

"You have sons in the army?"

"Eh! I had."

There fell a silence filled with the calls of animals, the gusts of wind, and the whistling of the agitated foliage. The old woman threw a few handfuls of ashes, approached us, and continued in a trembling voice:

"I had sons in the army. I have n't any now. The two younger ones were killed, you see. I have one poor boy still, but he 's hardly a soldier any more."

"He is wounded, perhaps?"

"Yes, he 's wounded. He has no arms."

The old woman placed her basket of ashes on the ground, pulled a straw from her waistband, fas-

tened to the vine-stick a branch that had been broken away from the line, and, suddenly straightening herself up, began to cry out:

"He 's been wounded as not many have been wounded. He has lost both his arms and he has a hole in his thigh big enough for you to put a bowl into it that would hold two sous' worth of milk. And for ten days he was like a man who is going to die. I went to see him, and I said to him right out: 'Clovis, you don't want to leave me all alone, do you?' For I must tell you that it 's a long time since they have had any father. And he kept answering: 'It will be better tomorrow.' For I must tell you that there is n't a sweeter boy in the world than that one."

We remained silent. One of us murmured, nevertheless: "Your boy is brave, Madame!"

The old woman, who was tending her vine, turned her faded eyes on us again, and said sharply:

"Brave! It would take more than that to make one of my boys show a lack of courage!"

She gave a sort of proud laugh, a smothered laugh which was at once swept away by the wind. Then she said dreamily:

"My poor boy, he 'll manage to get married all the same; for I tell you there is n't a sweeter boy in the world than that one. But the two young ones, the two little ones, that was too much, all at once. Yes, it was too much."

We could find nothing to say. There was nothing to say. Her hair blowing in the wind, the old woman began to throw her ashes again, like a sower of death. Her lips were pressed closely together; her whole figure expressed a mingling of despair, bewilderment, obstinacy.

"What are you doing there, Madame?" I asked, somewhat at random.

"I 'm putting on the ashes, you see—it 's time —with the sulphate. It 's time! I shall never get through; there are too many things to do, too many things."

We had got up, as if ashamed to distract this indefatigable worker from her task. With a sin-

gle impulse we took off our hats to bid her good-by.

"Good-evening," she said; "and good luck to you, too, you men."

We climbed all the way to the border of the wood without uttering a word. There we turned about to survey the valley. We could see on the other slope, in the mosaic of cultivated plots, the vineyard, with the old woman, very small, continuing to sow her ashes in the wind, which blew them about in clouds. The peaceful country-side preserved under the stormy sky an aspect of purity and resignation. Here and there the humble, shining villages were set into the earth like many-colored gems. And even in the fields, ready for the labors of the harvest, one perceived little specks slowly moving about: a population of old people struggling with the earth.

VIII

REGULATING

IT is an easy enough matter to die; but at least you should have the good taste to choose your spot. With us it is not as it is in China, where the dead are the lords of the empire and occupy almost more space than the living. In our land you must know how to die opportunely; otherwise the living look at you askance and say: "What good is that corpse? There 's no room for it here!"

In 1915 I was going through a sort of probation at the regulating-station of X. and I was on duty there three or four times a week. To be on duty meant chiefly to be on hand, and incidentally to assume certain little colorless duties of supervising and giving information. It is the usual thing for the officer of the guard to have his

quarters in a dismal little office adjoining the lamp-room. There he can champ his bit at his leisure and watch the military trains go by crowded with men who have been tested by ten months in the field and who sing as they go from one hell to another; for in war men don't look far ahead: as soon as they get away from the guns they abandon themselves trustfully to the delights of living.

One Saturday evening, then, I was stretched out on the straw mattress which took the place of a cot and which was swarming with mice. I could hear these amiable little beasts disporting themselves three thumb-lengths from my ear, as I lay listening absent-mindedly to the sounds about me. They were the sounds of every great station: whistlings, cluckings, puffings, the shriekings of windlasses and cranes, the vibrations of stretched wires, the clatter of the semaphores, the distant reverberations of colliding cars. But with them were mingled a sound and rhythm that were purely military: the measured tramp of a detachment on the march, the calls of the sentinels, orders being given, the ringing of bells; in fact, every

manner of thing that indicates the empire of armed force over the industrial system.

I had reached this point in my meditations when I saw Corporal Bonardent entering my retreat with a blinding acetylene torch in his hand.

"Lieutenant."

"I hear you, Bonardent."

"One of the guards of the commissarial train has got himself run over by Semi-permanent Sanitary Convoy Number Seventeen. Seems rather a pity."

"We 'll go and see, Corporal."

Two men awaited me outside with a stretcher. The night was magnificent, scarcely troubled by the lurid, nervous electricity of the station.

"It 's at La Folie," said Bonardent. "It 's a good bit from here."

La Folie was a railway crossing, about fifteen hundred meters distant. Of one of the workmen I enquired the way and we set out.

The marvelous thing about a great station is that an order of supreme, commanding importance, an order that regulates the fury of moving masses,

can present itself in all the appearance of a tangled maze of confusion. We began to walk along by interminable lines of cars. They seemed to have been forgotten there since the beginning of the war. One would have said from their stiffened axles, their rust-eaten joints, that they had been long out of use; but all at once the torch would light up an open doorway and you would see heaps of soldiers sleeping in the straw, or the stupid eyes of animals. There were compartments transformed into offices on wheels, where secretaries stupefied themselves among masses of papers, by the cozy light of some flowered lampshade; and you realized that the formidable administrative machine was ruling over the railways as it rules in its monstrous fashion all the way from the trenches to the clothing-shops in the farthest Pyrenees.

At times, as we crossed the large, dark open spaces, we would attempt to slip between two trains that seemed sunk in an eternal slumber; but suddenly, without our seeing a soul, the trains would begin to move and would come together

with a crash of iron couplings. Farther on we had to stop to let the sanitary convoys file past. At that time many of them were far from comfortable, and as they passed they would send us a broadside of racking coughs and whiffs of chlorine that smelled horribly of the hospital. Elsewhere there were herds of stubby mortars lashed fast to trucks, legions of rolling kitchens, machines the use of which it was impossible to guess, and all sorts of war material to which the night gave a fantastic appearance. Big, smoky rotundas sheltered the crouching locomotives that snorted under the livid glare of the arc-lights. To recall the life of former days, there were also suburban trains which carried sleepy passengers and expresses that passed through the chaos of rails like the crack of a whip. In short, the tumultuous mingling of military life and civil routine.

At last we reached La Folie. It was an important center of tracks, wheels, junctions, and cables. Three old workmen lived there in a hut. They were in their shirt-sleeves, turning cranks, pushing levers, directing with a calm experience

all the moving forces that were tangled together in this spot. They made me think of those old-time foremen in whom long practice takes the place of genius and who keep the business going while their employers give themselves up to a life of pleasure.

Above the noise and rumbling rose triumphantly the patient clicking of the telegraph.

"We 've come to take him away," said Bonardent.

"Ah! poor soul! He 's there under the sack, and everywhere else, worse luck!"

We entered the zone occupied by the corpse. I say "zone" intentionally, for the unfortunate man had been cut up and scattered about like a handful of grain in the sowing.

"Father in heaven!" said one white-haired workman. "He got down from his carriage without looking around. He made a mistake there! Too many things are moving about in this neighborhood. A man ought never to leave his place."

The face of the dead man was intact; but sixty cars had passed over his body, slashing him crosswise from feet to shoulder. We picked up the

debris, here and there, on all sides, fragments of bleeding flesh, entrails, and I remember finding a hand closed over a cheese. Death had surprised the man while he was eating.

It seems unbelievable, but the material of the coat had held; it concealed the hideous destruction of the body. Turning it about gently, I saw a military tag on which one could still read the name Lamailleux.

"I believe," said Bonardent, "we have the whole of him now."

An electric bulb perched high overhead lighted us with a succession of jerks; it seemed to be agitated by an exasperating tic.

We decided to take a short cut on our return, through the "Artillery," a vast sub-section where the munition trains were lined up. But as we approached the tracks, a sentinel appeared.

"Halt! The countersign!"

Not one of us had thought of it. The territorial held his gun across the passage. He was inflexible:

"I 'm sorry, Lieutenant, but you must go

through somewhere else. Those are the orders."

A wide detour brought us into the presence of another sentinel.

"The password, please? No one allowed through the Artillery without the password!"

"My friend, we are carrying a corpse."

I raised the corner of the sack and uncovered the bluish face. Under the acetylene light one could make out, through the confusion of bloody clothes, a bit of pale skin and some tattooed letters. The sentinel made a grimace of horror but said, nevertheless:

"Lieutenant, you must go through over by the main tracks. It 's not possible here."

We plunged again into the labyrinth of rails, accompanied by the clattering of signals and the sonorous rumbling of trains. At times the exhausted stretcher-bearers would stop and set down the litter on the slag in order to spit carefully in their hands. Then long passenger-trains would pass by us, and in their brightly lighted interiors we would see women reading and holding lovely sleeping children in their arms.

At last I saw the lanterns of the *quai*.

"Where shall we carry the corpse?" I asked Bonardent.

"Don't know, Lieutenant."

After some reflection I presented myself at the freight office. There was a more or less indeterminate establishment there, where all the wreckage thrown up by the maelstrom of the station was gathered together—strayed packages, men without employment, animals without masters, material without a destination, and, when necessary, corpses. A gendarme was smoking a cigarette before the door.

"There 's no room to-day, Lieutenant. The place is filled with refugees from the North, with their children and their bundles."

I said a few words of encouragment to my men and decided to go to the "isolés."

The pavilion of the "isolés" was filled with detachments that were rejoining their corps. The men were sleeping in heaps on the straw.

"Oh! you must see it 's quite impossible to put that in with the men," said an adjutant, shaking

his head. He added, as if to excuse himself: "Put yourself in my place, Lieutenant. I have no orders. I can't take charge of a corpse without orders."

I had sat down on a stone. The tired stretcher-bearers mopped their foreheads and muttered the words, "A drink!". I could make out the shapeless mass of Lamailleux, who seemed quite indifferent as to his ultimate place of crucifixion and awaited his final bourn with the sovereign patience of the dead.

"Perhaps you don't know the station very well," the adjutant remarked to me, "but there is a disciplinary section for the trainmen quartered here. If you wish, I 'll go and see."

I let him go and began to smoke, contemplating the night, which was beautiful and warm. The serenity of nature said as clearly as the agitation of men: "What does that troublesome fellow want with his corpse?" And an insect, in ecstasy in the grass, lifted his shrill voice like a tiny being who imagines that the whole world is his and was made for him.

The adjutant appeared out of the shadow.

"It 's very unfortunate, but there 's a fellow in there who has been imprisoned for drunkenness. He has vomited in the disciplinary station and is carrying on like the devil."

"All right," I said. "We 'll go and see the director."

The director was asleep. His assistant was reading some illustrated papers. Just as I began to tell my story he asked my advice about cutting out and pasting on the walls some of the little ladies of the "Vie Fantaisiste," of which he seemed to be an inveterate reader. As I maintained a rather morose air, he said, by way of digression:

"As for this sad story, it 's a great pity that the hospital is at the other end of the town. You can't go there at this hour. So put that thing in a compartment till to-morrow morning, my dear fellow."

Having relieved himself of all responsibility with this bright idea, the young man glued his nose once more to his pictures.

At that time they had not yet built in the regu-

lating stations those great board and cardboard hospitals that we now see everywhere. I did not consider his idea of the compartment for two seconds. In imagination I could see my improvised morgue setting out at night, bearing my corpse with it. It was madness!

I went to see the postmen. They were sorting the mail, singing in an undertone: "*C'est moi qui suis Nénesse.*" There was n't room for a rat in their tiny quarters, and at once it was plain that the whole matter was outside their province.

From that place I came out in a decided state of weariness. Truly, no one was interested in my dead man. I grumbled to myself: "Why why, Lamailleux, did you have to die in a spot where there is no room for corpses, at an hour when no one has time to trouble about them?" But even as I said this I felt, none the less, that a certain solidarity had been born between these remains and myself, and I looked at them as at something you don't know what to do with, but which belongs to you just the same and in spite of all.

"Where shall we carry the poor man?" said Bonardent.

Then the simplest idea occurred to me: "Follow me!"

Very quietly we returned to the lamp-room.

"No room here, Lieutenant."

"Keep right ahead, Corporal!"

I had the stretcher carried into the little room that was reserved for my own use.

"Now put it down there, by the side of my mattress, and go to bed."

The men went out, shaking their heads with astonishment. I remained alone with Lamailleux and stretched myself out on my blanket. The war had already taught me to live and sleep in the company of the dead, and I was astonished that I had not thought at once of so natural a solution.

For a long time, by the light of the candle, I looked at that fearful bundle that was my companion for the night. As yet there was no odor. I blew out the candle and was able to muse at my leisure.

From second to second there fell from the

stretcher, with a faint sound, a drop of something that must be blood. For a long moment I occupied myself with counting the drops while I reflected on many dreary things, the times we live in, for instance. The loud whistles of the engines were rending the darkness of space and I had already counted several hundred drops when I sank into a sleep which, like that of my companion, was without dreams.

IX

THE FLESHMONGERS

THEY have been summoned to appear at noon, but many of them will have to wait until nightfall.

They are assembled before the door of the building, collected together like a dark pool; there are splashes of them in the garden where a few groups are strolling about.

It is an afternoon in February. The heavy, troubled sky stretches away unbroken. It is swollen with such sad thoughts that it cannot concern itself with the little happenings here below. The wind is surly. It must know what is going on up there, but it tells nothing. It does not even convey the low rumblings of the guns; we are too far away; we must forget.

The wind is entangled between the buildings; it turns on itself like a wild animal caught in a trap.

The men pay no attention to the wind, nor to the sky, nor to the harsh winter light: they are thinking of themselves.

They do not know one another; they have nothing in common but the reason that has brought them together. They have a troubled, worn-out air, and yet they are unable to seem indifferent. To any one who looks at them carefully, however, there is something that unites them: it is a sort of absence of physical well-being, an unhealthy look about their bodies—too much fat, or too little, eyes lighted up by fever, at times an all too evident infirmity, more often gray skins, irradiated by poor blood. Never a joyous relaxing of healthy muscles: the whole assembly are as heavy as machines.

Some of the men, depressed at being part of a herd, and because it 's a relief to one's pride, have begun to talk; others, also from pride, are silent.

There are clerks among them, professional men, workmen, intellectuals, veiling with an eyeglass glances that are full of bitterness and wearing their hair long.

All of them are smoking. It has never been

more evident that tobacco is a remedy for the soul against itself.

From time to time two or three men approach the grill of the garden and disappear for a few moments. They come back, wiping their mouths, their breath heavy with the strong odor of spirits.

Several times an hour the gate opens. A gendarme appears and calls out some names. Those who are called cut through the crowd as if they were drawn by wires. The corners of their mouths are a little tightened. They assume an unconcerned, or weary, or grumbling air; and pass through under the archway.

They no longer see the February sky, they no longer breathe the wind, intoxicated with its odors of the cold: they are crowded together in an evil-smelling corridor, the walls of which, painted in nameless colors, secrete a slimy sweat. They kick their heels there for some time, then another door opens. A gendarme counts them off by the dozen, like fruit, or like animals, and pushes them into the great hall where the business is going on.

Immediately a violent odor of man assails their

nostrils. At first they do not discern very clearly whence comes the strange agitation that reigns in this place. But no time is given them to reflect.

And then what good would it do to reflect? Does not one immense groan rise from the whole sick land—an appeal, the death-rattle of a drowning people?

What good would it do to reflect? Does the frenzied whirlwind reflect which, roaring on its way, ravages the old world? No, truly, the times are not suited to reflection.

You must undress quickly and take your place in line.

The hall is vast and hostile. Its walls are decorated with maxims, with the busts of unknown men; in the center there is a table like that of a court of justice.

A personage is enthroned there who lifts aloft a rather disdainful white head, in which one distinguishes fatigue and obstinacy. Obscure supernumeraries are waiting upon him. Before the table are two spiritless men in white blouses, one

old and withered, the other still young and with an absorbed face.

The men advance in lines toward each of the white blouses; they walk one behind the other, like suppliants before the altar of an angry God. They do not know what to do with their arms.

They are not the flower of the race: long ago the finest men of the country went to live over there, in mud up to their waists, as quick to peril as cats.

For a long time there has lain in the farmer's winnowing-basket nothing but common straw and dust; and it is this he is ransacking with eager hands in the hope of finding a few scattered grains.

The men are not cold: a roaring furnace flings along the floor a breath as hot as the sirocco. Many are trembling, however, and they have goose-flesh, like people who are not used to being naked. They stand first on one leg, then on the other, place their hands flat against their hips, then let them fall, ashamed of their own touch. But other distresses await them: they soon cease to

reach for their pockets or to assume attitudes.

In a corner near the entrance a gendarme is manhandling a wretched little clerk who is slow in undressing; he never thought he would have to take off his socks and drawers; he is obliged to, and in despair he draws out two dirty feet.

The personages in blouses perform their tasks with a sort of feverish haste, like men who work by the piece.

A few summary questions, and at once they stretch out their hands, they touch, they feel.

The subject is rather pale. A warm dew pearls his temples. He stammers and speaks entreatingly. Then, when he is questioned again, he replies with confidence.

"You have nothing wrong with you? Do you cough?"

"Yes."

"No doubt you also have palpitations?"

"Yes, a good many palpitations."

"And pains in your joints?"

"Yes, pains in my joints, particularly."

"Your digestion is n't good?"

"No, my digestion is never good."

The man seems quite reassured. He replies with a sort of enthusiasm, like some one who is at last understood. But suddenly the old doctor shrugs his shoulders and uncovers the trap:

"Evidently you have everything the matter with you. Well, you shall be sent into active service."

The man staggers slightly and groans, in a colorless voice:

"But surely you know very well—"

"You have too many things the matter with you. Well, you have nothing at all the matter with you. Go along! Active service."

The man in the other white blouse is struggling with a fat old fellow with a wrinkled abdomen, who is hiding part of his body with both hands. He explains something in a low voice and escapes precipitately to put on his stiff-bosomed shirt and a coat which is decorated with the palms of the Academy.

At times one of the assistants coughs, and at once a storm of coughing sweeps over the assembly like a gust of wind.

A big, jovial fellow with gray hair comes out of the shadow. With a sort of disgust every one makes way for him. In consequence he addresses his neighbors: "Well, what of it? It 's nothing but skin-spots."

Behind him, sunk down on a bench, an elongated individual who might be of any age between twenty and sixty is carefully undressing himself. His face is pitiful, he seems submerged to the very lowest depths of human distress. He takes off an unbelievable number of garments and pieces of knitted underwear, and finally pathetic things appear—flannel chest-protectors, sachets, scapulars, clusters of medals. He arranges all these things on the bench; the clothes fall and are trodden underfoot by the new arrivals. The ageless man turns quite pale, as if they were walking over the secrets of his life, his very pride.

The sound of a discussion interrupts the humming silence. The old doctor exclaims, in a furious voice:

"I tell you I hear nothing!"

With his two hands he leans on the shoulders of a puny little fellow, as frail as a toothpick, who seems overwhelmed.

With one word the puny little man is precipitated into active service, and he goes off far more anxious, more shivery, more terrified than he will ever be out in the open field facing the machine guns.

At the other end of the room, however, a new phenomenon is occurring.

"I tell you I can march!" protests a decayed voice, wasted by some unknown malady.

"No," replies the young doctor, "be reasonable and go back to your family. We will take you later when you are quite well."

"If you don't want me it 's because I 'm done for. But I tell you I have reasons for going to the front, instead of staying at home to be bawled at every day."

A brief silence falls over everything; the echo of a drama is prolonged in it. The man is manifestly very ill. His chest is horrible to see and

heaves with an agitated breathing. He can scarcely hold himself up on his swollen legs, which are veined with purple.

"Rejected!" cries the judge.

And the unfortunate man returns to his clothes, his shoulders drooping, his glance dazed like that of a slaughtered ox.

The man following is a fatalist: he refuses to discuss his lot.

"That is n't going to prevent you from serving!"

"Oh, the devil! Do whatever you like!"

"Well, then, active service!"

"If you like! I don't give a hang!"

And he retires immediately, bound over, like one who has staked his future on a toss.

All who pass leave in the hall a little of the strong odor they have of unwashed men. It 's a strange fact, but they all have a fetid breath; on this day, at least, they have eaten too quickly, digested their food poorly, smoked too much, drunk too much. From all these mouths there comes forth the same hot, sour breath which be-

trays the same emotion, the same derangement of the mechanism.

Little by little the atmosphere of the hall thickens. The lamps, which have been lighted early, seem padded with a sticky mist that makes everything damp. But above all, in this air there is something more secret, something more troubled, less evident; it is like an overcharge of nerves, a dust of broken wills, a detritus of the imagination, left behind here by these men who strip themselves naked, who are afraid, who wish, who don't wish, who agonizingly measure their resistance and the sacrifices they must make, who struggle, tugging at their oars, against the rushing flood of destiny.

The men in the blouses continue to toil heroically, in the midst of these human bodies. They never cease feeling, handling, judging. They dig the tips of their fingers into the flesh of the shoulders, into the flanks, into the fat of the buttocks; they pinch the biceps between the thumb and the middle finger, move the joints, look at the teeth and the insides of the eyelids, pull the hair, tap the chest, as custom-house men tap a barrel.

Then they make the men walk from left to right and from right to left, they make them lean over, straighten up, kneel down.

At times it is as if a little fresh air ran through the room. Two well-built young men protest their conscription! One can hardly understand how they happen to be there at all. The entire tribunal looks at them in amazement; they are like nuggets in the midst of a handful of mud.

They pass with a proud, slightly forced smile. Once more there begin to file past pathetic uglinesses, despairs, incurable and violated timidities. This tribunal makes one think of a rugged cliff against which, like sea-birds driven by the tempest, these bewildered beings come to wound themselves.

The doctors show signs of exhaustion. The older of the two, who is a little deaf, plunges into the work like a wild boar in the underbrush. The younger one is in a visible state of suffering and irritation. He has the troubled, anxious look of one who is doing a work which he hates and to which he cannot reconcile himself.

And always the human flesh flows past; from the same corner of the room keeps arriving the uninterrupted file of human bodies, advancing with soft steps over the floor.

Sacred human flesh—holy substance that serves thought, art, love, all that is great in life—you are nothing but a vile, malodorous paste that one takes in one's hands with disgust, to judge whether or not it is fit for killing!

A persistent and general headache sets in.

The company goes on with its duties as if in a dream, with the silences, the slow moments, the black intervals of bad dreams. Two hours more pass in this way.

Then, abruptly, we hear some one say: "There are the last ten!"

They come in and take off their clothes in their turn. They have waited so long that they seem crushed with weariness, stupefied, prostrated. They accept the decisions without opposition, like the blow of a fist on the neck; and they go out hastily, without speaking to one another, without looking at one another.

The members of the tribunal wash their hands, like Pontius Pilate; they sign the papers ceremoniously, and disperse.

It is night. The wind has fallen. A fog, reeking with factory smoke, still covers the town. At the foot of a street-lamp one of the last men to be judged is vomiting, convulsively, the glasses of wine he has drunk during the afternoon. The street is dark and deserted.

X

LOVE AND PONCEAU

I HAD been at the hospital of Saint-Mandé for perhaps two or three days when Ponceau was brought there.

I have only confused memories of this period of my life. For a good while I had been lying in a field of oats near Charny; then I had slipped into a sort of dream, in which I saw my broken arm turn green, turn black, become so heavy and swollen that it filled the whole world, while I felt myself fastened to it like a pigmy to a mountain.

All this came to an end in a comfortable bed in the midst of a great bare room, painted sea-green.

I had been put under chloroform and they had made great openings in my arm, out of which came, every day, fragments of bone, blood, pus, quantities of repellant things that smelt bad.

To be brief, when I began to be conscious of what was about me, the first thing that met my eyes, unless I am mistaken, was Ponceau.

As he appeared to me that day, Ponceau was a big, fair-haired boy, a little too plump, with a discolored little beard and large eyes, very large eyes, which I saw were continually moving. I was lying on my back, but I had only to turn my head to see my room-mate, who was also lying on his back and quite motionless, except for those big eyes that moved all the time.

I could n't help asking him suddenly: "What are you looking at, up there?"

He said, "What?" and then answered, with an absorbed air, "The sun."

Indeed, I saw on the ceiling a beam of sunlight that moved from left to right; as I was very tired, I involuntarily began to gaze at it and follow it with my glance. At the end of a moment I asked:

"You can't turn your head?"

"No, I can't," he said; "it hurts my leg."

"What 's your name?"

"Mine? Ponceau, Emile."

He said no more; a major had just entered, calling out: "Stretcher-bearers! Stretcher-bearers! Bring in the next one."

The "next one" was Ponceau. He was seized by four men and placed on a sort of rolling bed, which we all held in horror and which we called the "omnibus."

I heard Ponceau cry out in a slightly befuddled voice that seemed to come out of his cheeks: "Oh, no! Gently there! Gently, those swollen . . ."

Then, hearing nothing more, I became absorbed again in contemplating the spots of sunlight.

I don't remember how long it was before they brought the "omnibus" back with Ponceau on it, or rather a sort of Ponceau, a poor fellow with a violet face, breathing loudly, babbling, snoring, with clenched fists and exhaling an odor of chloroform, an evil odor to which I have now taken an intense dislike.

The whole of his left leg was enveloped in a great zinc dressing. They placed him in bed; he was limp as a rag and it occurred to me that I must have had the same look, myself, two days

before. The idea that it might happen again chilled the skin on my cheeks and gave me cramps in my toes.

Ponceau finally came to. He stammered, casting wild glances all about him: "Ah! my poor fellow! My poor fellow!"

In the evening he was able to talk, and he gave me some details. He had been wounded at Château-Thierry. A bursting shell had injured his thigh. He suffered a great deal and had the impression that this thigh was "not getting on half as well as it should."

Unfortunately, this impression of Ponceau's seemed to me quite justified. A melancholy period began for us both, made up of incessant suffering, monotonous, regular as the military life itself.

I was too ill to be interested in many things: the red-head opposite screamed all night, and the Algerian Touïtou kept bringing us bonbons, saying: "Well, how goes it?" Those are the clearest of my memories. But I knew all about Ponceau; for when my arm was conveniently placed

on the edge of the bed, I had only to look to see him; he was my natural horizon.

Ponceau suffered, too, but not in the same way that I did. I was like a woman in childbirth: with every pain I felt myself taking a step toward recovery. As for Ponceau, one would have said, on the contrary, that every new pain took a little more flesh off his bones. Each morning the stretcher-bearers came to get us. They usually carried me out on a stretcher; Ponceau would go off on the "omnibus." We would meet again in the room for surgical dressings. My arm was certainly not handsome, but it seemed a charming thing beside Ponceau's thigh. That had a hideous wound, large enough to hold a soldier's *képi*,—a great greenish wound, with the bone broken at the bottom.

It is useless to tell you what passed in that famous room. As for me, I let out several good screams. And, by heaven! I don't blush for them; for I've heard many another man scream, and some of them the bravest, too, beginning with my Ponceau.

After the dressing we had a little time, which was the best part of the day. Mme. Briant would come to feed us—oh! not much: an egg, a little soup, a few grapes. Mme. Briant is one of my happy memories of the war. Slender as a young girl, with big, timid eyes. There was one who did n't pose as a strong-minded woman! As soon as you began to scream her eyes would grow red and fill with tears, so that you finally had to restrain yourself in order not to cause her pain.

About the middle of the afternoon the fever would begin. We would stop talking and lie watching the ceiling. I felt as if I had a hideous headache just behind my eyes; I could n't endure the light. I felt myself being filled up, swollen up with something stronger than I, like anger or fear; it would let up at about eleven or twelve at night, leaving me trembling all over.

But Ponceau was growing thin with extraordinary rapidity. His round face had become hollow, and a mass of wrinkles appeared in it. His eyes remained enormous, and seemed quite out of keeping with his face.

Then his cramps began. They attacked him nearly every minute and tortured his broken thigh. As long as the crisis lasted he would press his lips, which were cracked with fever, tightly together. When it was over, he would say, as he always did: "Ah! My poor fellow! my poor fellow!"

You may have noticed that when people are very wretched they call others "my poor friend," or "my poor sir," as if these latter were to be pitied.

Ponceau was given morphine, at first once, then twice or even three times a day. His eyes would take on a strange look; they would always seem to be seeing something beyond what they were looking at. He would dream out loud and murmur: "If only she were here. If only she could come and see me."

Ponceau was in no condition to make confidences, and I did not presume to ask him for them.

One morning, the major with five stripes, the good "Papa Coupé," looked at Ponceau's leg and said: "Put him to sleep!"

Once again Ponceau came back from the op-

erating-room with a foamy mouth and a contorted face. They had taken out a great piece of bone. The cramps disappeared, but Ponceau did not seem able to get any better.

In the afternoon he asked for Mme. Briant, and collecting his wits, dictated several touching little letters, all addressed to the same person. I learned in this way that Ponceau had gone to the war, leaving his young wife in Ferté-Milon, in the Aisne, and that, having had no news of her at all, he was writing at random, wherever he thought she might have taken refuge.

I understood the sort of anguish with which he kept repeating: "If only she were with me! If only I knew where she is!"

But the days passed and I realized with sorrow that Ponceau was going to die. He did not always recognize me and would sink into a sort of desperate agony, talking like a child, saying, "Dodo, bobo," refusing all food and abandoning himself to fate like a man who has lost all hope.

It was then that a miracle happened. On a

certain Thursday I had gone peacefully to sleep, digesting the first lunch that was worthy of the name, when I was awakened by the sound of a soft conversation beside me. They were speaking in low voices and that was precisely what had awakened me. I at once thought, "Ponceau is dead!" and I opened my eyes.

Ponceau was not dead. Between his bed and mine there was a woman sitting, a very attractive little woman with chestnut-colored hair and a very white face. She was clasping one of Ponceau's hands in one of hers; the other lay on her knee, and I saw that it was trembling continually, although almost imperceptibly.

But what astonished me was the face of my comrade. To say that he had suddenly grown fatter would seem exaggerated; yet that was the impression he gave me. As for being flushed, he was, and not with the tint of fever but with a healthy color that I had never seen in him. And as for the wrinkles, I think he had hardly half as many as before.

He noticed that I was awake and called over

to me: "Gustave! Here 's my wife! She 's found again!"

I was presented to Mme. Ponceau. She had gentle eyes that were quite moist, and I saw that she was with difficulty restraining a strong desire to weep. But it would not have done to weep before Ponceau; he was radiant. The young woman had drawn out of her little bag a beautiful bunch of grapes and some cakes, and the dying man began to eat them.

"Do you like them? I don't even know what they are. I took anything that came. I was out of my mind."

He replied between two mouthfuls, "They 're delicious!"

Whereupon Mme. Ponceau kissed his hand and said, "He 's so good! so good!"

Ponceau urged the cakes upon me, and then he explained: "You see she did n't wait for the Boches. She skipped off to Brittany. The whole trouble was to find each other again."

It was not enough for them to find each other again. He had to live now, and Ponceau went

through some terrible days. Love had performed a miracle; but every day the fever returned to the assault. Then love repeated its miracle, and so things went.

As the condition of the wounded man was considered very grave, Mme. Ponceau was permitted to come every day. She would enter as soon as they were willing to open the door to her; she would sit down between the two beds, take her husband's hand in her own, and stay there till evening. Sometimes Ponceau was in pain; then they would not talk. She would merely look at him in a fervent, determined way, and I think that look did the man as much good as the quarts of serum they injected into him, drop by drop, through the skin of his abdomen.

Toward five, a polite but irascible little officer would come through the room.

"Come, Madame, you must go; time 's up."

Ponceau would get angry and dart fiery glances in all directions.

"Five minutes more still! Come, she does n't disturb any one, poor little thing." And he

would add, in a low voice: "Did you see that fine fellow? He had his nerve with him! He wants to separate me from my wife."

At times the officer would add some remark concerning discipline: "Madame, do not put your bag on the bed of the wounded man."

Ponceau would snap peevishly, "Put it on Gustave's bed!"

The other would continue, "Madame, take your bag off the bed of that other wounded man."

Then Ponceau would say, in an amiable tone: "Well, give it to this polite officer. He 'll hold it while we kiss each other."

Ponceau's wound suppurated a great deal. At times he would remark shyly: "I 'm afraid that does n't smell very good. It 's not my fault; it 's the disease."

And he would look at her with anxious eyes. But she would always answer that she noticed absolutely nothing.

She brought him flowers. Above all, she brought him her loving, tearful glance, which possessed all sorts of powers. One day he exclaimed:

"Look here, Gustave! It seems to me that they're not giving me any more of their blessed injections."

It was true. They had taken away his morphine without his seeming to notice it. He concluded, with a restrained enthusiasm: "You see! There are two of us now to pack away my misery!"

When his wife had left he demanded my opinion: "She's pretty; isn't she?"

And he no longer said anything to me without adding, "You who haven't any wife, poor fellow!"

One day they perceived that Ponceau was distinctly better, and they spoke of no longer permitting his wife's visits, except twice a week.

Ponceau wept for a whole morning the real tears of a child, which left his big eyes swollen, filled his nose with water, and completely disfigured him.

Papa Coupé, who was very fond of Ponceau, came in in a great rage. As he was always at odds with the administration, he seized the opportunity to demand that Ponceau should be transferred to

the supplementary hospital in the Rue des Petites-Ecuries, where he often went to operate and where he reigned as king.

"You must bring Gustave along, too," Ponceau ventured.

"We 'll bring him," said Papa Coupé.

And it was thus that we quitted the hospital of Saint-Mandé.

The Rue des Petites-Ecuries was a Garden of Eden for us.

Supplementary Hospital No. 335 had been set up in a Hungarian hotel which had been sequestrated at the beginning of the war. It was supported by the contributions of a group of rich women who acted as nurses and filled the house with movement, grace, and powerful perfumes.

We were received by Mme. Potocka, the directress.

She was a former beauty, with a regular, rather heavy profile, a large bust, and gestures which were authoritative, maternal, and slightly languorous.

Mme. Potocka was waiting for us on the ground floor. She took her place beside us in the elevator and we felt ourselves ascending.

"An elevator!" Ponceau exclaimed to me. "That will be mighty good for me with my game leg."

We stopped at the second floor. An enchanting spectacle awaited us there. There were thirty or so beautiful ladies, each one better dressed than the others. They surrounded our stretchers with a whirling whiteness that dazzled and even deafened us a little.

Only with great difficulty was Papa Coupé able to restore calm in this lovely multitude.

"Come, ladies, come! Allow us to take the wounded men to the surgical dressing-room. There will be enough for all."

An excellent gray-haired person leaned solicitously over my stretcher. She addressed M. Coupé in a supplicating voice, tinged with a foreign accent:

"Tell me, Doctor! is this the one who is to be my own little *blessé?*"

"Madame Prosteanu, you must address yourself to Madame the Directress."

The directress had her own ideas. She consulted her books and said, "If you approve, Doctor, we will put these two in Room Sixteen."

And so it was that we were confided to the care of Mlle. Caporal. Room 16 was a hotel room, and a luxurious one, with two good brass beds and a couple of arm-chairs.

The next morning Mme. Ponceau took her place in one of these chairs, and she came back faithfully to sit there every day.

As for me, I soon made the acquaintance of the other arm-chair. My arm was not healed, but I was getting on fairly well. I began to get up and profited by my opportunity to visit the whole house. It was in January, 1915. Long months had gone by since we had been wounded. As for me, I was to remain paralyzed always. Ponceau's wound was beginning to get well, though his leg resembled nothing human. He no longer had any thigh, if you can say so; the knee began right up at

the hip and the rest was misshapen, fleshless, almost transparent, it was so thin.

I confess that for my part I should have much preferred a good artificial leg to such a limb. I say this and then you look at my arm and it occurs to you that in place of such a rag you would prefer a wooden arm, with beautiful nickle joints. Which proves that it is very hard really to put yourself in the place of any one else.

Ponceau's leg was no longer in its cast; it wore only a simple bandage. For several days Ponceau seemed gloomy to me, and one morning he said:

"My wife has n't yet seen what 's left of my leg. If only it does n't horrify her!"

I advised him to get Mme. Ponceau accustomed to the sight and the idea of it.

I shall always remember the poor boy, as he stammered, hesitatingly, that very evening:

"Look, Françoise, it is n't very . . . very beautiful; but I 'm going to show you my leg."

He pulled the sheet back carefully and revealed first the bandage, then the entire leg.

I was standing at the foot of the bed. I saw Mme. Ponceau give a little trembling smile and answer in a heavenly voice:

"But, my darling, you can hardly see anything wrong with it!" Then she kissed him, saying, "The main thing is that you are saved."

Ponceau was saved. From that time on he had n't the least fear, the least mental reservation. His happiness was complete. All life opened out before him. He took on weight. This obliterated, one by one, the lines in his face. Every morning he would sing "La Riviera" at the top of his lungs; and when Mlle. Caporal would object he would exclaim, "It 's just high spirits!"

Mlle. Caporal was a pretty, dark-haired girl, who had known what sorrow is. When Mme. Ponceau came in the nurse would look at her with the interested, indulgent, sympathetic air of a big sister who knows what love is and has suffered herself. Then she would go out on the tips of her toes, breathing deep sighs of resignation.

In the afternoon I would usually go out and

walk about the house, leaving the married pair to their artless happiness.

Sometimes I would meet the old officer who was in charge of the military administration. He hardly ever came out of his office, where he spent dismal hours, a victim of endless papers of which he had a superstitious and servile fear.

He would always make the same reflection to the surgeons: "Yes, indeed! I should much prefer to operate, too. You have nothing but a moral responsibility."

And he would return to verify his "cases" and to cover the bottom of his sheets with cabalistic signatures.

Mme. Potocka was the head of the house. It was her dream to impose an iron discipline on all her nurses, whom she saw for the most part divided between a great need for devotion and the tyranny of worldly habits.

"Do be more simple in your dress!" she would say to Mlle. Flegenheim, a pretty Jewess with scarlet lips. Which did not prevent Mme. Po-

tocka from covering her own copper-colored hair with a new cap every day, one that was every day whiter, better embroidered, and with larger wings.

Sometimes I would go into the operating-room where our dear Papa Coupé was enthroned.

It was in vain for Mme. Potocka to cry, "Not more than two ladies in the operating-room!" It was always before a numerous and highly perfumed audience that the shell-splinter, finally extracted from the living flesh of the wounded man, would fall tinkling into the basin. Then a murmur of admiration would arise: "Oh! Doctor! Doctor! That was admirable!"

And Papa Coupé would laugh naïvely, with an air of saying, "That 's just the sort I am!"

The conjugal happiness of Ponceau caused a great deal of talk in the house. I was often stopped on the stairs by M. Potocki, an aged civilian, a little doll of a man, an idiot of a millionaire, who would ask:

"How is your comrade getting on? You know, Boisseau, Pinceau, Boursault? You

know! Poor boy, he has a very charming young wife."

Mme. Potocka had unreservedly granted her high protection to Ponceau's wife. So the latter enjoyed every favor in the establishment that was compatible with a vestige of military life.

It was in the midst of general enthusiasm that Ponceau took his first steps. They had offered him a magnificent pair of crutches, and he leaned on them with an anxious, intoxicated air, while the unfortunate leg swung back and forth, like a badly hung puppet. All those ladies were crowded together in the corridor and it was a question which one was to help the wounded man to move; Françoise Ponceau followed, her hands clasped, pale with fright and emotion.

From this day on Ponceau would get up for two or three hours every afternoon, and things were at this stage when a famous incident occurred.

On each floor of the hotel there was a large landing where the ladies would gather as soon as they had finished their work. You would hear them

chatting there about strategy, gowns, surgery, charities, and the big shops.

Lovely eyes made to watch tennis-balls or appreciate the shade of a scarf were now reflecting with a determined gravity the hideousness of the surgical dressing-room, of amputated arms, of gaping skulls. Beautiful mouths, made for eating rare fruits and forming gracious words of love, pronounced with authority phrases like "amputation of the shoulder" or "gangrene of the leg." The war had not transformed life: it had added itself to life, augmented it, bringing into it mourning, unknown terrors, passionate duties, a tragic and romantic opportunity to multiply one's destiny.

But along these paths of the war, bloody and ringing with the cries of stricken men, drifted a feminine perfume that had not changed and was as precious, childish, and intoxicating as ever.

On the first floor Mme. Seigneuret was enthroned. Her husband was at the front, in a regulating-station, "very closely watched by the enemy aviators." Nevertheless Mme. Seigneuret did not lose her head; she knew how to disguise

her distress and show that she was resigned in advance to all the blows of fate.

Now, one day, when I was talking with this charming woman, busily explaining to her the exact extent of the perils that menaced M. Seigneuret, I saw Mme. Potocka hurrying down the stairs, with as much precipitation as elegance would permit.

"Come here, my dear Odette, I have something to tell you," she said breathlessly to Mme. Seigneuret.

At that moment there was a little baby-faced blonde on the landing who for four months had been wasting away in the corridors of the hotel, consumed by a mystic need of devoting herself and caring for the wounded.

"Mlle. Neveu," said the directress, "won't you go and see whether your man with the amputated arm wishes to dine in the refectory or in his room?" Mlle. Neveu moved off like an angelic vision, and Mme. Potocka continued: "You can imagine I could n't explain it to you before that child. It 's about Ponceau."

I had moved away and pretended to be watching the movements of the elevator, without, however, losing a word of the conversation.

"Just think, my dear, Ponceau has asked my permission to go out some afternoon, to see his wife, in private. There! You understand?"

"What! with his leg!" exclaimed Mme. Seigneuret, softly.

"Of course, yes! With his leg! He could n't leave it here; could he?"

At this moment Mme. Prosteanu approached, accompanied by a stout woman, still attractive, who, if I remember rightly, was called Mme. Lestourneau.

In a few words these ladies were told the news.

"That poor boy," added Mme. Potocka, "has explained to me, as best he could."

"And he has suffered so much!"

"Oh! undoubtedly he deserves it," declared the directress.

"But then with his leg! Think! With his leg!" persisted Mme. Seigneuret.

"Come now," broke in Mme. Potocka, "he

should n't be deprived for his whole life of embracing his wife, just because he has a deformed leg."

In a few minutes the "Ponceau affair" had made the rounds of the establishment.

They were talking about it, guardedly, on all the floors, in all the corridors. The news went up and down with the elevator; it slipped into the rooms where the ladies were keeping watch, it was murmured even in the operating-room.

At every instant I would hear a feminine voice whisper in a feminine ear, "Have you heard?"

"What?"

"About Ponceau, you know: the thigh case, in Room Sixteen."

"Oh! yes! Poor boy! I know. After all, he certainly deserves it."

"Just think, six months! And how he has suffered!"

"Oh! he 's better; but even so, with that leg!"

"That 's true, with a leg like that. Just think!"

The ladies did not fail to think. In my opin-

ion they thought a little too much, and I felt slightly irritated at seeing the private affairs of my poor Ponceau blazoned out just as if they were in the newspapers.

The matter remained strictly among the married women. When Mlle. Neveu or Mlle. Flegenheim or the other young girls appeared, all mouths shut so tightly, by a concerted agreement, that these children would immediately ask, "What is happening? Is there any news about the *blessé* in Room Sixteen?" And as no one answered, they only conceived a livelier curiosity.

Toward evening Papa Coupé made his appearance. I heard the noise of a great discussion he was having with the directress.

"Oh! no, Doctor," she was saying "you must n't bring us any appendicitis cases here; they 're not interesting enough. Only the wounded; we don't want any but the wounded."

"But, Madame," the good man apologized, "by curing an appendix we are giving back a gun to France."

"Yes, but it 's far less interesting than our dear

blessés. By the way, have you heard—about Ponceau?"

"The mutilated men can still do their duty by their country: they have given it their blood; now they can give it their sons!"

Dr. Guyard gave a sort of lecture on the subject, in the midst of an attentive group: "Every time I save a man's life by cutting off his leg, I think before anything else of the race."

"Are you sure, Doctor," Mme. Seigneuret asked, obstinately, "that the children who arrive won't also have their arms or their legs—"

I returned to my room, in two minds between a desire to laugh and a genuine annoyance. The sight of Ponceau calmed me. He had just parted from his dear wife and was smoking Egyptian cigarettes, lying on his back, altogether blissful.

Besides, he had nothing to say to me. He seemed the only person who was ignorant of the agitation that was shaking the whole house.

In the evening Mme. Potocka came to see him.

"It 's all arranged, Ponceau. I have taken

your permission up to be signed. It will be for Friday."

"You are very kind, Madame. Many thanks!"

Mme. Potocka went out, with a smile that was full of indulgence and encouragement.

Perhaps Ponceau expected that I would say something to him; but as I remained silent he contented himself with murmuring:

"A permit, my dear fellow. My first permit. That 's something like!"

The next day, Thursday, witnessed the growth, the efflorescence of a magnificent exaltation. At his awakening Ponceau found himself the possessor of a great bottle of eau de Cologne. Almost every minute the door of Room 16 would open and a lady would come in, upon some futile pretext:

"Would you like some illustrated papers?"

"Mademoiselle Caporal, shall we send the barber for your *blessés?*"

Mlle. Caporal assented. She seemed to have been informed of what was going on, and that

was not surprising; for she was no longer a child, she had a certain experience of life.

The barber came up. Ponceau had his hair cut, his head shampooed, his mustaches slightly trimmed. He received all these attentions quite naturally and without noticing the enthusiasm of which he was the object.

Mme. Prosteanu came and sat down familiarly on the edge of the bed, in her usual way. She brought Ponceau the very last word in confectionery, a cardboard shell filled with chocolate drops. When the wounded man thanked her in confusion, the old lady answered in a maternal voice, "Take it out with you to-morrow. You can offer some to your charming little wife."

I went out into the corridor and began my daily promenade. Dr. Guyard was leaning over the stairs and calling to Mme. Potocka "No! Certainly not! You can't give him a bath, because his leg is n't healed. But have him well soaped in warm water."

And Ponceau was soaped in warm water and rubbed with eau de Cologne.

Mme. Ponceau came in the afternoon. She was overwhelmed with all sorts of hints. But, like her husband, she was plunged in a tranquil ecstasy and did not seem to notice the excitement that reigned about her.

In this way Thursday passed. Ponceau slept the sleep of innocence. It is doubtful if sleep showed the same generosity toward all other creatures that night.

On Friday morning the directress made a new appearance.

"Ponceau," she said, "I have been seeing about a carriage. It will be waiting for you at the door just after twelve o'clock."

Dr. Guyard came himself to arrange the dressing with Mlle. Caporal. Instead of a gauze bandage the good young lady wrapped about Ponceau's thigh a marvelous band of soft flannel which she fastened with a gilded pin ornamented with tiny purple beads.

It was a long time since Ponceau had had any military clothes, as he had dressed for his room in nothing but sumptuous striped pajamas. A

little before lunch Mlle. Caporal brought him a pair of red trousers, such as non-commissioned officers wear, a thoroughly cleaned overcoat, and the *képi* of an artilleryman—articles chosen from the best-furnished shelves of the hospital store-room. The whole house wore a slightly festive air. People would greet each other, saying:

"He really looks very well."

"Then it 's to-day?"

"Yes, he goes out at noon. He 'll be back for supper."

Ponceau ate that day, by special favor, the menu of the officers: a chicken wing and some rice pudding. They also gave him a cup of strong coffee and a half-glass of champagne. He took everything with candid satisfaction, saying:

"It is n't like Saint-Mandé here: they know how to do things well."

A little before noon he appeared in the corridor. The entire personnel of the hospital, to the last one, had gathered there.

Mme. Prosteanu surreptitiously fastened a little

bunch of flowers to his coat, saying, "You will look like a bridegroom."

And Ponceau climbed up into the carriage, where the beautiful, calm smile of his young wife awaited him.

I passed the afternoon wandering about the hotel, smoking cigarettes. Outside, it was a white, cold winter's day; but the house, overheated by the breath of the furnace, seemed congested. A stormy atmosphere, saturated with nervousness, prevailed in it.

All the ladies were assembled on the landings or in the sitting-rooms. There was none of the usual loud conversation and laughter. There was nothing but absent-minded smiles. They talked in little groups, with lowered voices. The young girls kept apart from the groups of married women, saying ostentatiously, "Oh! I beg your pardon," which showed that they were perfectly well aware of what was going on. They also had little secret meetings, in which mysterious conversations took place.

Time passed slowly and heavily. It dragged over the benches, stopped on the steps of the staircase, seemed absolutely motionless at the half-open doors.

Every one had a restless, impatient air, as if they were waiting for the dénouement of some delicate situation.

Mme. Prosteanu suddenly pulled out her watch and said, "It 's three o'clock!"

A profound silence greeted these simple words, and the perfumed air seemed suddenly peopled with all sorts of released dreams. One would have said that the human imagination had spread itself abroad through it, impregnated it, even given it a fragrance of its own.

"My ears are buzzing," said Mme. Lestourneau, naïvely.

"It 's true, it 's very warm," remarked Mme. Seigneuret, "and I have a tingling in my legs."

Mlle. Caporal withdrew, on the pretext of an indisposition. Mme. Prosteanu, sunk in a sofa, was talking gravely with a distinguished-looking

person, whom I heard murmur in a mournful voice as I passed:

"Monsieur Gastinel is always the best of husbands, but it is n't as it was in the first days of our marriage."

Mme. Potocka was leaning on the railing of the staircase, talking with young Mme. Coutourieux.

"I have n't always been fortunate in my confinements," she said. "I suffered a great deal with my last boy, especially during the first months."

And Mme. Coutourieux replied, "Motherhood is a sacred function."

Then all at once she moved away, as if overcome with emotion.

"Where are you going?" asked the directress.

"I 'm going to do my massaging," the young woman replied, abruptly.

Outwardly there was no thought of Ponceau at all. But he filled the house from garret to cellar, and they were thinking of him while they believed they were thinking of themselves.

A little time passed, and Mme. Prosteanu, draw-

ing out her watch again, exclaimed, "Well! It 's after four o'clock!"

This was the signal for a sort of relaxing. All the ladies found something to do and seized the occasion to move about.

I had the impression of a general lassitude and a vague melancholy. A sort of charm had just been broken. Something in the world was finished and they turned the page sadly.

Mme. Seigneuret rose, stretching her beautiful arms.

"Oh! What a horrible war!" she exclaimed.

With extreme candor, Mme. Lestourneau remarked, "Ponceau will soon be back."

At once the entire company pretended suddenly to remember Ponceau: "Why, yes! That 's so! That poor Ponceau!"

Mme. Potocka was clever enough to say: "That good Ponceau! We had forgotten all about him. . . ."

But a presence of mind like that was not equally developed in them all; in consequence, a few mo-

ments later, we heard the youthful voice of Mlle. Flegenheim cry out, "There he is! There he is!"

A carriage had just stopped before the hotel. And it was indeed he.

There was a general scamper to the stairways. Ponceau appeared, hopping clumsily on his crutches amid the snowy blouses.

He was smoking a big cigar. His color had been heightened by the cold outside. His eyes were full of an immense good nature, an immense happiness, and a permanent astonishment.

"Are you pleased with your permission, Ponceau?" Mme. Potocka asked, discreetly.

"Indeed, yes, Madame."

Then the elevator seized Ponceau and snatched him brutally away from the curiosity of all. It was in Room 16 that we met again.

As we were dining Ponceau said to me: "I 've seen the Bois de Boulogne! That 's a great sight, old fellow, eh! A great sight! It 's ripping to be alive still, old fellow, and to have your dear little wife!"

He made me no other confidence, and I never

knew exactly how he spent his first furlough.

That evening in bed, as he was unfolding the newspapers, he suddenly exclaimed, "You can't guess what I found in the pocket of my overcoat! A bottle of Melissa water! I don't know why they made me a present of that! But it must n't be thrown away: we 'll uncork it and have a good drink."

XI

A BURIAL

AS we were taking our places at table M. Gilbert asked, "For what hour have they set the burial of Lieutenant Limberg?"

"Three o'clock, Monsieur," the faithful Auguste replied to the head doctor; "an infantry guard has been asked for; it will be furnished by the lieutenant's own battalion. This battalion is unloading guns and ammunition at Morcourt."

"Good! Ask Bénezech to come here."

And we gave ourselves up to the bitter-sweet joys of a cucumber salad. September was passing, but the brazier of the Somme had redoubled its fury. The grumbling of the guns filled all space, exactly as if a drama were taking place in the bowels of the earth. We were rather stupefied after having passed several sleepless nights, nights spent in struggling against this torrent of

blood and in rescuing the human wreckage from it. Lieutenant Limberg was one of the saddest cases; we had taken him in tow three weeks before and all at once he had slipped his cable, struck down by a nasty case of meningitis, stammering, dreaming the most extravagant things out loud—things that made him hideous and gave death the appearance of some frightful comedy.

There is nothing more painful, nothing that offends the soul more, than to watch the ravings and sufferings of these men who have been wounded in the head, to see a young lad of twenty degenerate. How many times, wearing myself out in the midst of these shameful spectacles, have I wished that those who hold in their hands the destiny of peoples might be allowed to contemplate them. But let 's speak no more of that. Alas! we can never give imagination to those who don't possess it. Let 's speak no more of that, and return to the burial of Limberg.

We were struggling with a tough slice of beef, when Bénezech entered.

The Abbé Bénezech, a hospital nurse of the sec-

ond class, performed several functions, including those of secretary and chaplain. He was a plump man with a slow wit and a majestic chin. He allowed his beard to grow untended and felt very keenly the lack of those little attentions at which devoted parishioners are so adept. Far too holy a man to attach much importance to matters of his toilet, he had gradually turned into a sort of neglected old bachelor. He practised patience, waiting until they should return him to the delicate ministrations of his parish.

"Bénezech," said M. Gilbert, familiarly, "at what hour are you to bury Lieutenant Limberg?"

"At three o'clock, *Monsieur le Médecin-chef*."

"The body is laid out?"

"It 's been placed in the *tortoise*."

"Good! Was the lieutenant a Catholic?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, Monsieur! Thanks be to God, I gave him the communion yesterday!"

"Then everything 's all right. Thank you, Bénezech."

The attendant went out. We returned to our somnolent state and to a dish of noodles which

was well calculated to discourage the appetite.

When the meal was about over, an orderly entered and handed a card to M. Gilbert.

"The officer," he added, "insists on seeing you at once."

M. Gilbert returned the card with the attentive air of a man who is falling asleep.

"Well," he sighed, "bring him in here, then." And he added, as he turned toward us, "Second-lieutenant David. Do you know him? No?"

The second-lieutenant was already pushing open the door. He wore a little infantryman's cap over his tightly crisped hair. Heavy lips, a tiny curled mustache, the magnificent dark eyes of a Smyrniot merchant, a suggestion of obesity, short plump hands.

"*Monsieur le Médecin-chef*," he said, "my battalion is going up into the line and I have profited by our passing to ask you for permission to see one of your wounded, my best friend, Lieutenant Limberg."

M. Gilbert, who had a mobile little nose, ex-

pressed by a slight gymnastic turn of that organ that he was very much disturbed.

"Give the lieutenant a chair," he began, with the presence of mind of a man who knows how to announce painful news. Then he continued: "My poor friend, what I must tell you about Lieutenant Limberg is very sad: the unfortunate man had a very severe wound in the head, and . . ."

"He is dead?" asked the infantry officer, in a colorless voice.

"Yes, he is dead. We are to bury him to-day at three o'clock."

Lieutenant David remained for some time without moving. A nervous twitching began to agitate one side of his face. He seemed overcome and mopped his forehead, damp with sudden sweat. We respected this very evident grief. At the end of a moment he rose, gave the military salute, and prepared to take his leave.

"Excuse me, Monsieur," he said; "he was my best friend."

With a preoccupied air he extended to all of us a fat, moist hand, and was about to go out,

when he stopped a moment on the threshold.

"One word more, *Monsieur le Médecin-chef:* my friend Limberg was an Israelite. I myself am an Israelite. It is perhaps not immaterial to tell you this."

And he went out. There was a brief silence; then M. Gilbert began, with an accelerated rhythm, to rap the table with the handle of his knife.

"What was it he said? Limberg a Jew? This is too much! Call Bénezech."

M. Gilbert was a headstrong man, violent, explosive in his reactions. He seemed to have forgotten the heat, his lassitude, his digestion. With a furious ardor he flung little bread-balls into all the corners of the room. He had the concentrated, terrible air of a cartridge that feels the fuse burning. He stopped Bénezech short on the doorsill by a display of his vocal resources that left no room for doubt as to his own feelings.

"Ah! It 's you! Well! You were going to get me into a nice mess again!"

"*Monsieur le Médecin-chef!*"

"Lieutenant Limberg, yes! Very well! He was a Jew, and you were going to make me bury him a Catholic!"

"A Jew?"

"Exactly, a Jew!"

The abbé gave a smile of supreme incredulity: "He was not a Jew, *Monsieur le Médecin-chef*, for I gave him the holy communion only yesterday."

M. Gilbert stopped short, like a horse face to face with a wheelbarrow. Then he murmured, as if in a dream, "Yes . . . Well, it looks as if some one were making a fool of me."

"Oh! *Monsieur le Médecin-chef!*" protested the abbé, and he raised his hands, palms to the front, with a grace surprising in a soldier who cheerfully wore his puttees in corkscrews about his ankles.

"You have given him the communion," continued M. Gilbert; "yes, evidently. But what did he say about it?"

"I don't know just what he could have said," interrupted the faithful Auguste, "seeing that he has n't been able, for more than ten days past, to talk reasonably."

"That 's true!" remarked M. Gilbert. "What do you say to that, Bénezech?"

"I am amazed, *Monsieur le Médecin-chef*. I should never have insulted him by asking him, especially in the sad condition in which he was. Besides, he came here with several holy medals about his neck. I myself gave him several and he received them very gladly."

"Evidently," said M. Gilbert, "all this is not very clear. You tell me Limberg was a Catholic. Very well! I have just been assured from another quarter that he was a Jew. First of all, you are to send for the rabbi of the stretcher-bearers' division. Afterward, to make more sure, send a cyclist to Limberg's battalion, at Morcourt. We shall find out from the corps."

Bénezech went out, raising his hands several times, his fingers spread, in token of embarrassment.

"Let 's go to the *tortoise*," suggested M. Gilbert, getting up from the table.

It was an unused tent, full of holes, under which the religious ceremonies were performed and where the corpse was placed on its bier.

Limberg's coffin was lying there on two boxes, wrapped in an old flag. A ray of sunlight, filled with a twinkling whirlwind of gnats, cut the shadow obliquely. A few chickens were picking at the fine gravel. This funereal spot seemed like a haven of calm on the edge of the tumult of the war.

An attendant came in, stuck two candles on the table, lighted them, and placed a crucifix between them.

"The devil!" said M. Gilbert. "Affairs like this are a perfect nuisance!"

As we were coming out of the tent we perceived Bénezech and the cyclist. Bénezech's very beard looked triumphant. With his fingers to his *képi* he saluted like one giving a benediction, and said in a celestial voice:

"Information from the battalion, *Monsieur le Médecin-chef:* Lieutenant Limberg was a Catholic."

"By the twenty gods!" exclaimed M. Gilbert. "You have a written note?"

"No," answered the cyclist, "the officers simply consulted together and replied that he was a Catholic. As for that, you can see these gentlemen at once; they are coming for the burial with the guard of infantry."

M. Gilbert pawed the ground. He was quite red and the end of his nose made little spasmodic movements which announced the imminence of a decision.

"May I prepare for the service?" asked Bénezech, with the candid, restrained air of a man who will not abuse a victory.

"What?" said M. Gilbert, "the service? Prepare for it! Prepare for it! I have my own idea now."

The faithful Auguste, who had left us a few minutes before, came back, examining a bundle of envelopes.

"I have looked through the personal belongings of the lieutenant," he said. "There is nothing conclusive except this post-card signed by a certain Monsieur Blumenthal who calls Lieuten-

ant Limberg his cousin. Blumenthal! That 's Jewish."

"Perhaps," said M. Gilbert, "but that makes no difference to me now. I 've got an idea of my own."

"It is true," continued Auguste, hesitatingly, "we could still have the coffin opened."

"No, that would tell nothing," broke in M. Gilbert. "And besides, I tell you once more, I have my own idea. Let 's get to work."

Thereupon we returned to our work, which continued until half-past two. At this moment the orderly reappeared:

"*Monsieur le Médecin-chef*, it 's the Jewish chaplain, I understand. He wishes to see you."

"I 'm coming," said the chief.

He put on his handsome *képi* with its four stripes, took off his blouse, and went out.

From the window I watched the arrival of the divisional rabbi. I saw him get down from what looked like a junk-dealer's cart, hitched to a knock-kneed mule. With his black skullcap, his long flowing beard, his tall swaying body, his frock-

coat, his staff, he made me think of the Jews of the popular romances. He seemed very old and descended from the cart-step with the majesty of a patriarch.

Full of curiosity, I went out to see a little of what was going on. Twenty steps from the cart, at a turn of the path, I saw the rabbi again, without at first recognizing him. He had a curling black beard, a slight figure, a great deal of assurance, the smile of an Assyrian god, and something in his eyes that was like a reflection of the Eastern Mediterranean.

I went around a shed and found myself suddenly nose to nose with the chief and the Jewish chaplain. I saw at once that I had been twice mistaken: he was neither the Wandering Jew of the newspaper romances nor the Levantine Semite of the great ports of commerce. He was a man of the world, without any definite age, wearing eyeglasses, with a studious and attentive air and something distant and professorial about him: the "distinguished" manner of a fellow of the university. He spoke the slightly cosmopolitan

French of a learned man who understands six or eight languages and pronounces none of them quite correctly.

"Inteet, Monsieur le het doctor," he was saying, "we haf many Limpergs in the East. I know seferal such families myself."

"That is quite possible," replied M. Gilbert, courteously. "To be brief, I have made a certain decision. Come this way, chaplain."

We made our way slowly toward the tent. As we were just about there, the ground shook under the rapid beat of a little band of soldiers on the march and the infantry guard appeared. Several officers followed at a distance. Every one halted before the tent and we saw Bénezech come out. He had covered his jacket with an ancient surplice, which looked like a veteran not only of this present war but of all the wars of the last century.

"Gentlemen," said the head doctor, gravely, "a very annoying thing has happened. We cannot find out with absolute certitude what the religion of Lieutenant Limberg was. The information you sent us seems to show that he was a Catholic."

"And even a communicant," added Bénezech, in the brief silence that fell.

"May I ask you on what you based your information?"

The officers looked at one another as if taken by surprise.

"By Jove!" said one of them, "he never told us he was a Jew!"

"But yet—"

"Well, I know one certain fact," said a captain. "He went to mass with me several times."

"But, confound it!" shouted M. Gilbert, "that proves nothing! I often go myself, from time to time. It 's true," he added, "I am not a Jew. As for Limberg, one of his most intimate friends came to see me this very day; he told me that the lieutenant was an Israelite."

A new silence fell. The infantry were forming groups in the avenue. The audience had a hesitating, troubled air. The two priests had not yet looked at each other and seemed to be giving great attention to the officers' uniforms.

Just then two stretcher-bearers came out of the

tent, carrying on a litter the bier with its tricolor draperies. They took three steps and, suddenly, there was the corpse between the priest and the rabbi. M. Gilbert stopped them with a gesture.

"Gentlemen," said the head doctor, in the voice of a sage who is remembering Solomon, "gentlemen, since we are in doubt, I have decided that Lieutenant Limberg shall be buried according to both the Catholic and the Hebrew rites. In that way there will be no error, only an excess of zeal. We know that God will recognize His own. These gentlemen will perform in turn. I believe that I am doing a just and wise thing."

The officers shook their heads in a way not to express any sort of opinion. The two priests for the first time looked at each other. They exchanged glances across the coffin and bowed as if they had never seen each other before. They both assumed, spontaneously, a curious smile; but the eyes had no part in it: they gazed at each other like two persons of the same family who, having fallen out twenty centuries before, have met again at the house of some business man.

The stake between them was not a soul, but this box with its rigid body, disfigured by ten days of agony, this box covered with the symbolic cloth which the breeze stirred lightly.

The two priests looked at each other with interest for a long moment. On one side the country curé, with the heavy limbs of a peasant, on the other the refined, cosmopolitan rabbi, with his complex smile, as old as the Bible.

"It 's true," whispered the faithful Auguste into my ear, "Bénezech gets them a great deal oftener than the other fellow; he could afford to let him have one from time to time."

"Keep still, you!" said M. Gilbert, who had overheard. "You are an idiot to talk like that: this is a very serious matter."

Bénezech had just given a slight shrug with his shoulders; he lowered his eyes and stammered:

"*Monsieur le Médecin-chef*, if Lieutenant Limberg was really an Israelite, I think it better for me to retire."

"Do as you think best, Bénezech," said M. Gilbert.

The rabbi continued to smile. He had the patient face of a believer who knows that the Messiah has already failed once to be at the rendezvous and that perhaps it will be necessary to wait for him a few million years longer.

"Then," said Bénezech, quite low, "I withdraw, *Monsieur le Médecin-chef*." He took a few steps, and we heard him murmur as he moved off: "The main thing is for him to have received the communion; and he has received it, twice."

The rabbi still smiled, as if he were thinking to himself, "As for me, I stay."

M. Gilbert made a gesture. We heard the shout of an order, and every one lifted his hand to his *képi*.

XII

NUMBERS

NO, old fellow, the war has n't changed everybody.

You did n't know M. Perrier-Langlade?

He was what is called a great organizer. Happening, for example, on some place where everything seemed to be going well, where every one belived he understood his work and was doing it in the best possible way, M. Perrier-Langlade, who possessed an original idea of practical reality, would point out that everything was going badly. He would at once change the position of every object and the function of every man. He would walk about, gripping in his right hand a cane which was in a way his working instrument and with which he played like a fencer or the leader of an orchestra: he would touch everything with this irritated cane, and let fall orders like a rain

of hail. An organization upon which his genius had been exercised would take several weeks to return to its normal functioning and recover its former prosperity.

M. Perrier-Langlade had ideas of his own, and that 's always a serious matter. Men of power who have ideas will never admit that simple mortals can have any. The way to get on with M. Perrier-Langlade was to act so that he imagined he himself had conceived the ideas that you wished ardently to see carried out. Even that did not always work, for this elect spirit had a happy habit of changing his ideas several times a day, a trait that reveals a great generosity of temperament. He was a man always being upset by some whirlwind. As he could n't do anything properly by himself, he had none too scrupulous a notion of the relations that unite the act and the idea. But that 's the price you pay for holding a position of power, and besides, M. Perrier-Langlade was a great organizer.

He loved figures. Let us do him this justice; he handled them with an audacious mastery. He

saw in them a profound significance that will forever escape souls as little mathematical as ours.

I had seen M. Perrier-Langlade only from a distance and rarely, when it fell to my lot to have an interview with him. Whew! that is a good deal to say, considering the modesty of my rank; I should say I was permitted to hear M. Perrier-Langlade speak close at hand, and to profit from the sort of information that constituted the most important expressions of his personality.

It occurred last winter, during those weeks when it was very cold. For fifteen days an east wind had been blowing, as cutting as the law and as dispiriting, too.

This cold and this wind had been the cause of an epidemic of fires at the front. People had filled to the bursting-point any number of little epileptic stoves which from time to time communicated their fever to the end wall of a barrack. The flame would put its nose outside, the wind would snatch at it, twist it, inflate it like a veil, and that would usually cost five or six thousand francs' worth of wood, paper, canvas, and

various other materials. When the Germans saw one of these fires within gunshot, they would send along a few shells with the charitable design of helping to ward off the disaster. Why not? You make war or you don't make war. And the unhappy world is making it: there can be no doubt of that.

We had lost in this way several outhouses and barracks which were fortunately isolated, and these accidents had helped to advertise our presence, when one night, toward one o'clock in the morning, a fire, a serious fire, broke out in Ambulance 521, which we could see on the plain about three or four kilometers away from us.

We had put on our sabots and gone out to watch the spectacle: the vast leaping brazier, the country stiff with blue frost, the moonlight, which the wind seemed to ripple like water, the reflection of the flames over the country-side, as bleak as Siberia and gaping with the old trenches of 1915.

Our hearts were wrung at the thought of what might be going on down there, but we dared not leave our division.

We were wise not to: toward three o'clock a troop of automobiles came tooting up to the doors. They brought us a part of the wounded who had been snatched out of the catastrophe.

They were taken down from the cars. Poor things, they behaved very well. There were two with fractured skulls, a blind man, a man with an amputated leg, another with a broken leg, and several others less gravely wounded. They had lost in the fire everything they possessed as soldiers—that is to say, the little canvas bags which were fastened to their cots and in which they placed their knives, their match-boxes, three or four old letters, and a stub of a pencil. I repeat, they behaved very well, but they were a pitiful sight; for they gave the impression of men who have waited a long time on their straw mattresses, in the midst of the flames, thinking to themselves: "If they don't come after me right away, in five minutes it will be too late."

We put them to bed and warmed them up. They needed it. I remember that the one with the broken leg was wearing a sort of dressing, wadded

with cotton, in which little icicles were glistening. In short, it was all very dismal.

The night was spent in these duties and the morning found us chatting about a big bowl of coffee. The wounded men had begun to doze. It was almost warm in their barrack. We had given them cotton caps, knitted woolen underwear, and a big cup of scalding hot condensed milk; and they were sleeping with one eye open, so to speak, like men who are thinking: "Phew! That 's the second time I 've been pulled out. I 've got to look out for the third!"

It was then, old fellow, that M. Perrier-Langlade appeared on the scene.

I had gone out, I don't know why, and was walking in my sabots over the crusted snow, when I saw a luxurious automobile stop by the roadside. The door flew open and M. Perrier-Langlade burst out, buried under a sumptuous mantle of fur.

I said to myself: "Ah! that 's good! There 's Monsieur Perrier-Langlade, come to comfort those poor devils of ours."

I had a hundred meters to go. I flung myself

dizzily over the piles of snow and arrived, somewhat out of breath, just in time to stand at attention before the door. M. Perrier-Langlade stamped his foot.

"What!" he exclaimed, "no one here to receive me when I get down from the car?"

"I beg your pardon, *Monsieur le Principal*—"

"Be silent! You can see well enough there is no one! Last night you received some wounded from Five-twenty-one. I went myself to see that fire. I went at two o'clock in the morning, at the risk of catching pneumonia. But that 's not all: I wish to have some one here to receive me when I get down from my car. If you had not been here, there would have been no one, and it would never do for me to wait in cold like this. You are to place an orderly here, to be on duty permanently."

"Certainly, *Monsi*—"

"Be silent! How many wounded did you receive last night?"

"Thirteen, *Monsieur le Principal.* It is true that—"

"Wait! Thirteen! Thirteen!"

M. Perrier-Langlade began to repeat this number over and over as if to himself. It was evident that this simple word suggested all sorts of profound thoughts to his mind. I don't know what stupid need to talk made me open my mouth just then.

"Nevertheless, please observe, *Monsieur le Princip—*"

"Be silent!" he said angrily. "Thirteen! Thirteen!"

I felt greatly confused and relapsed into silence. It did not last long. Ravier arrived at full speed; he had noticed the automobile and had rushed over. He stopped short five paces away, his heels sinking in the crackling snow, and saluted.

"There you are," remarked M. Perrier-Langlade, "and it's none too soon. How many wounded men have you received here whom you ought not to have received?"

Ravier flung me a despairing glance. I showed him my open hand with the fingers spread, and

Ravier, who had not lost all his wits from surprise, replied at once:

"Five, *Monsieur le Princip*—"

A bellow from M. Perrier-Langlade cut his words short.

"Five! Five!" said he. "So it 's not thirteen; it 's five!"

I jumped as if some one had stuck a hat-pin into my back.

"But please observe, *Monsieur le Principal*, that it 's not—"

"Be silent!" he said again, with calm authority. "Five! Five!"

And he began to repeat this word with an air that was at once Olympian and indulgent, like some one who cannot be angry with other men because they are ignorant of the supreme joys of the philosophy of mathematics.

We were looking at each other, full of consternation, when we heard the clicking of a pair of sabots, and good M. Morgue appeared, his nose red with cold, his stiff little beard, like a brush

of fine mist, jerking out in front of him with the rhythm of his panting breath.

"Ah! at last!" exclaimed M. Perrier-Langlade. "At last you are here, Monsieur Morgue! Be good enough to tell me how many men you have actually in hospital in your barracks."

"Twenty-eight, *Monsieur le Principal*."

"There now! There now! It 's neither thirteen nor five, it 's twenty-eight! Twenty-eight! And I suspected it."

We examined one another in turn, as if struck with imbecility. M. Perrier-Langlade, carried away in sublime meditation, was walking up and down, repeating: "Twenty-eight! Twenty-eight!"

I noticed that his voice had a rustic quality and was not devoid of good nature. For a long time he repeated, at first shaking his head, then with increasing jubilation: "Twenty-eight! Twenty-eight!" and I felt certain that in his mouth the numbers did not have the same meaning that they have in yours or mine.

At last he saluted us abruptly, with a com-

manding and imperious courtesy: "Au revoir, gentlemen! Twenty-eight! Twenty-eight!"

And he went off to his automobile, rubbing his hands one against the other, with the savage joy of a man who carries with him an absolute certitude.

XIII

DISCIPLINE

FRANKLY, I don't regret those four days in prison. They gave me a magnificent cold (for I am permitted to remark that the disciplinary establishment is lacking in comfort) but they inspired me with efficacious, with edifying, reflections. Can I still cry out against injustice, when I know that I am indebted to it for inestimable insights and benefits? No, I don't regret having, at the age of forty-six years, made the acquaintance of what we have agreed to call "the damp straw of the dungeons." But let us take up the affair at the beginning.

When the sergeant, who is not at all a bad man and who has been saddened by bladder trouble, came and said to me, "Monsieur Bouin, you are to have four days of prison," I experienced at first an astonishment that was mixed with incredu-

lity. Still, it was morning and the sergeant, who never jokes before he has got his bearings, added with a mournful air: "There was a guard duty that ought to have been taken by one Bouin and was not taken. Perhaps it was n't you, my poor Monsieur Bouin, that skipped your guard, but it 's certainly you who are to have the four days in prison."

The sergeant was silent. I felt a certain weakness in the pit of my stomach, and a very disagreeable feeling of heat in my cheeks. Up to the first days of the war my life had been peaceful and happy; there were some emotions I was not used to; for all that, I was none the less sure that I was indignant now, keenly indignant.

"Sergeant," I said, "it 's impossible! I stood my guard at the ambulance day before yesterday, and I shall stand it again to-morrow. But I was not assigned to guard duty last night, I assure you."

I must have been trembling and quite red, for the sergeant looked at me for several seconds in a pitying silence. Then he said: "Wait; I am

going to see the officer of the administration." And he went out.

I set to work once more, polishing the parquet floor. It is very fatiguing work for a man who has spent all his life in the study of mathematics; but in the month of September, 1914, a great spirit of resolution and sacrifice animated every Frenchman who amounted to anything. I had volunteered to serve my country humbly, proudly, to the limit of my strength, and since the appeal was made chiefly to my physical strength, I polished the floor every day with enthusiasm. On this particular morning I found that I was rubbing it with frenzy, so much so that great drops of sweat began to blur my work. I was disturbed by this but satisfied: you water your native soil with whatever you can; don't you?

The sergeant came back.

"Monsieur Bouin," said he, "the four days are indeed for you, and it 's a dirty trick they 're playing you. Just lately there has come into the service a volunteer doctor with your name who has not yet received his rank. Since he is acting

as a major, he does n't do night work. But the secretaries, who never know anything, put him on guard duty just the same, and it was this guard that was not mounted. Do you see? Then the officer with three stripes ordered the four days in prison. They pointed out to him that he could n't punish the doctor, who had nothing to do with that work. The punishment has been placed upon the roll for some one named Bouin; and as it must be carried out, it appears that you are the one to suffer."

I was holding in my hand one of those sticks on the end of which the floor-polishers stick a bit of wax. I was so completely stupefied that I let this object fall. The walls of the echoing chamber indiscreetly emphasized this clumsiness with a clatter as loud as a box on the ear. I was very miserable.

"Go and see the officer yourself," said the sergeant, with an air of being deeply moved. "I myself must go away now; I have some signatures."

I placed the brush and stick in a corner, and

went off toward the office, buttoning my waistcoat with trembling fingers; for my calm of manner is only assumed and I was experiencing some difficulty in retaining control over myself.

I knew the officer: he was an old Alsatian whom the war had dragged out of a mayor's office, where he was enjoying the leisure of his retreat. He had struck me as not at all a bad man, or even a trouble-maker; I did not despair of making him yield and seeing him give way before the evidence.

"Ah, it 's you, Bouin," he said, calmly. "Well, you 're to have four days in prison. You will begin at noon."

"*Monsieur l'officier*," I said, "I am indeed Bouin, Leon Bouin, and—"

He cut my words short:

"The first name is of no account. There was no first name written on the roll. You saw 'Bouin'; it was your business simply to go."

"*Monsieur l'officier*, my days of guard duty have been regularly fixed for the last two weeks. I had not noticed—"

The little man stood up, and I saw that he was so short as to be almost ridiculous. He advanced upon me with a sort of stuttering anger that seemed to be all tangled up with his mustache.

"A punishment has been imposed," he said; "it must be carried out. Well! You must bear it. What is your profession?"

"Professor of mathematics; enlisted voluntarily."

He responded with an air of concentration: "Just because you enlisted voluntarily, you need n't imagine you are going to have everything your own way here. Men of education like yourself ought to set a good example. Be advised by me; do your four days, my boy."

"But, *Monsieur l'officier*—"

"Take my advice and do them: it is n't at such a moment as this, when the enemy is still at the very gates of the capital, that you should spread among us the seeds of insubordination."

"But, *Monsieur l'officier*, discipline—"

Deep, regular lines appeared on his forehead

and around his mouth. Then he rolled out in a heavy, disdainful, melancholy tone:

"Discipline! You don't know what it is. You will never know what it is! Do your four days!"

From the gesture that accompanied these words I realized that I must go. Thereupon some astonishing words came out of my mouth:

"*Monsieur l'officier*, I shall lodge a complaint with the head doctor—"

The little man ran his hands through his papers.

"That's right! That's right! Just another troublesome fuss! And they expect to win victory with men like this! Get out! Get out!"

I had an impression that he was groaning and I found myself in the corridor. A water-pipe ran along it half-way up the wall, and the water was flowing softly through it with a soft murmur that seemed as if it had been part of that silence since the beginning of the world.

I went back to my work, staggering.

At this time the third division had M. Briavoine

as managing doctor. You know what a charming and sympathetic man this eminent physician is. Heavens! what an engaging way he had of entirely believing everything he said, and how I loved to see those deep lines about his eyes and across his large, open forehead whenever he smiled!

M. Briavoine was in his office when I went in; but on this day no smile occupied that face which was so full of wrinkles and majesty.

"No, no!" he was saying to his assistants. "Dufrêne has the rank of general; that's quite true! But as for me, I am Briavoine; simply that!"

This firm declaration was received in respectful silence. The fame of M. Briavoine extended beyond the continent. He had made himself illustrious in the delicate art of helping infants into the world, and it was into his hands that many princesses had painfully delivered the crowned fruit of their loins.

I was so much occupied with my own fate that

I began to cross that room without any real or apparent aim; and as I was doing so I stepped very clumsily on the feet of M. Briavoine.

"Be careful, my friend," that courteous man remarked to me, good-naturedly.

M. Briavoine's great urbanity, the pleasantness of his voice, the exquisite correctness of his gesture, poured healing waters over my wounded self-esteem. I sank back with gratitude and modesty into a corner of the office where the papers were being sorted. And I thought, "How polite that man is and what a broad point of view he has!"

Little by little I regained possession of myself and began to listen to the conversation of the officers, who were gathered in the room, with what soon became a most keen interest.

They were expecting, on that very day, the visit of the medical inspector-general, Dufrêne. This important personage was accustomed to exhibit himself before the army with a spirit and audacity that were worthy of the greatest praise but were nevertheless the object of the liveliest criticism.

M. Briavoine took off his jacket with its officer's stripes; gold and silver adorned the sleeves.

"Give me a smock," he said. "Monsieur Dufrêne wishes to be received by his subordinates in regimental dress, but the requirements of our profession demand the use of a blouse."

A slight breath of rebellion stirred the atmosphere of the room. There rose a murmur among M. Briavoine's assistants, in which one could distinguish irony, bitterness, and a sort of hiss. The master, clad in white, flung a satisfied look over his person.

"I shall," he declared, "receive Dufrêne at the very outset in a blouse, without a *képi*, and if he thinks it suitable to object that this is n't according to regulations, he will find not simply a subordinate but some one who knows how to keep up his own end. I serve my country in a way that is indisputably disinterested; accordingly, I don't wish to be pestered. What have I to expect? I have my marshal's baton as an *officier de complément*, and my work in civil life has brought me all the honors to which I can aspire."

At these words, which were so full of justice, we saw Professor Proby come in. He was a tall man, with a muddy complexion and a glance full of gravity that bordered on dullness. He usually expressed himself in vociferations, breaking up his sentences with all sorts of interjections and monosyllables that completely destroyed its sense. He plunged into the conversation with the grace of a buffalo:

"Hell! What's this I hear? Well, well; I don't care a hang about him, I! Now! He knows quite well that— What? I am Paul Proby, I am! And I belong to the Academy, I do! And, anyway, he knows perfectly well that —Look here! I'm a member of the Academy. As for me, in matters like this. . . ."

It was true: Professor Proby honored the Academy with his assistance. He tapped his foot, making the glittering spurs jingle, and rattling the sumptuous pieces of an outfit that he had taken out of his wardrobe at the beginning of the great war.

"Dufrêne, now," he continued—"I have al-

ways been on good terms with him; but it does n't do for him—What?—to put us all out. Is n't that so?"

M. Briavoine, who was a man of tact, felt that the conversation was straying from the subject. With one stroke of the oar he swung the skiff back into deep water.

"It is not a question of persons here, but a question of principle. We are not, like our enemies, a brutally subjected people."

This general consideration immediately perfumed with philosophy the sunny air of the little chamber. Every face was attentive, and the spirit of rebellion took on an appearance of good order and seriousness.

Ever since my interview with the administrative officer, one word had been dancing in my head, and I repeated it mechanically, dissecting the syllables with an obsessed anxiety.

I had the sudden impression that this word was going to be pronounced, that it was ripe for the occasion, big and growing bigger, that it was coming out of my head, that it was going to escape and

circulate among all those mouths that were talking there.

"One cannot," said M. Briavoine, "ask from the French that passive acceptance of uncontrolled authority. I will confess without shame that our race is the least disciplined in the world, the most intoxicated with independence."

"Authority, like alcohol, is a poison that makes men mad," said a young man, who concealed a keen glance behind his spectacles.

"Assuredly," replied the master. "As for discipline. . . ."

I gave a veritable sigh of relief. There it was. The word had come out, and I watched it roll about outside me with a mingled feeling of deliverance and curiosity. I looked at the distinguished obstetrician with real gratitude. My inner satisfaction was so strong that, in spite of my very humble position in the army, I took the liberty of giving M. Briavoine a plain sign of approval. But approbation is pleasant, no matter from how humble a source, and M. Briavoine

gave me a flash of one of those smiles of which his beard was full.

"Perhaps," he suggested, "discipline is not a French virtue. But, thank God, we have others; and permit me to affirm that our critical spirit alone, for example—that spirit which is so fine, so keen and delicate—is worth more than all the ponderous qualities of our enemies."

The entrance of Dr. Coupé had passed almost unnoticed in the general absorption. By the side of his colleagues this excellent old man seemed like a last year's leaf which the storm seeks violently to shake from its fastenings. He hesitated for several seconds between an inborn terror of authority and a certain taste for argument. The vehemence of the opinions he heard being voiced gave him no liberty of choice; and the dried leaf was whirled away in the gust.

"We are ready to give our blood, if they ask us," announced Dr. Coupé, laying down a principle; "but, by heaven, they must ask us politely!"

"Ha! That's the least we must have, cour-

tesy!" growled Professor Proby. "I am very respectful of discipline, I am; on condition—What? what? We must insist upon courtesy in these matters."

"Do you know what Dufrêne did day before yesterday?" hazarded an imposing personage, who was endeavoring by a skilful effort of his neck and chin to keep his beard in a horizontal position, and who gained an exceptional majesty from this attitude. "Just listen," and he began to relate, in the midst of a concert of protests and laughter, the last little scandal hatched out by those imaginations which the reading of the most glorious and agonizing communiqués of the war cannot satiate.

There were about fifteen officers in this room. Four or five of them were counted among what are called the princes of science. The war had given me a unique opportunity to approach these distinguished personalities, and I assure you I experienced a quite justifiable emotion at hearing them talk so freely before me.

My conversation that morning with the administrative officer had greatly upset me. Mathe-

matics gives the spirit unconquerable habits of order. I am, unfortunately, a single man, but I have serious and reasonable ideas about society and the family. I know that great mathematicians have dreamed about triangles that would not have three sides, or of parallel lines that would meet in infinity. I am not even capable of following these masters over such ground. Perhaps I am even too old now to venture along such lines. What can you expect? I find I am satisfied with what I know. In browsing through my library, turning over my note-books, I have always experienced a reassuring sense of discipline. Moreover, the study of mathematics gives one a logical sense. But what had happened to me that morning was not logical; or, to put it in other words, it was not just. And the idea that the reign of order could demand something illogical, that, in the midst of all the confusion of the war, seemed to me the worst sort of incoherence.

So you may imagine the relief, almost the intoxication, which I experienced at hearing these eminent men justify the insubordination of my

conduct. I listened to their words, punctuating them with approving nods of my head. I felt a keen and almost trembling joy, a joy mixed with pride and superstitious terror.

Little by little I became aware that this last emotion was stronger than the others. I dreaded lest I had been almost too right; without knowing about my case, these gentlemen were giving it too ardent an approval. This verbal exalting of insubordination caused me exquisite discomfort, almost anguish. Though I was reduced to silence by respect, yet for all that I did not cease mentally to exhort them to be calm, and I kept saying to myself: "Careful! careful! Be cool, gentlemen! be cool!

Such was the state of my mind when, amid the tumult of voices, we heard the ring of a bell, the bell of the entrance office. Then there fell a strange silence.

"*Monsieur le Principal*," said the sergeant, appearing in the doorway, "the car of *Monsieur le Médecin inspecteur général* has been signaled at the gate."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed he whom every one familiarly called Papa Coupé. Then, with a mechanical gesture, he adjusted his *képi* on his head and took a step toward the door.

"Where are you going?" asked Professor Proby, in a haughty but uncertain voice.

"I am going to receive him on the front steps," the good man replied

"What! But there are people to do that. We can wait for him in our own quarters."

"You must n't think of it," said M. Coupé, "the custom—"

"It 's because—that fellow—I, you know, I used to call him just Dufrêne, in civil life," grumbled the big beard with the muddy complexion. "And I maintain that—yes!—in this matter!"

"It 's necessary," M. Briavoine decided; "as a matter of politeness. Let us go to the steps. By the way, give me my coat."

"Don't you wish to keep on your blouse, my dear master?" asked the young man with the sharp glance.

"Of course; but I should be afraid of catching

cold. Give me my *képi* also: I can't cross the garden with my head uncovered."

M. Briavoine turned toward me.

"My friend," he said, "will you be good enough to get the register for observations and come with me." Then he repeated, as he put on his cap, "There 's no point in catching cold."

A shaft of hot sunlight was coming in through the open window. It struck me that M. Briavoine had nothing to fear from the cold, and I secured the register.

The group of officers were now descending the main stairway with a tumult of voices and boots.

It seemed to me that a slight anxiety tempered the warmth of their discourse. As we arrived under the balcony I heard M. Briavoine say to M. Coupé:

"This is the first time since the war began that I have met the medical inspector-general, Dufrêne." He added, not without a certain gravity: "Vernier, will you be good enough to go up again to the quarters and see if the non-commissioned officers' hall has been swept? Just a few minutes

ago there was some cotton waste lying about."

"As for that," grumbled Proby, "he has no right to come this way and put us all out, for that 's the only way he will be received! We 'll tell him, eh! we 'll tell him all we have on our minds."

"For my part," interrupted Papa Coupé, "I sha'n't hesitate a moment to demand important changes in the arrangements of my service."

As we were nearing the grand entrance Professor Proby had a sudden change of mind and, taking aside one of his assistants who was wearing a blouse, he said to him:

"Look here, you; hurry up and put on your full-dress uniform: it will be more suitable."

The inspector-general's automobile had just stopped before the steps. It opened like the bursting of a dry fruit and expelled its contents on the asphalt.

Oh! what an impressive personage! He was tall and of what seemed to me enormous proportions. A square face of the type which we have agreed to call martial; strongly marked features, where the nails and fingers of the sculptor had

passed and repassed; as for the nose, the thumb must have lingered there, shortening it and slightly crushing the flesh. Stiff tufts of white hair, of that quality which seems reserved for aged army men, a mustache, and a little beard. He wore the general's uniform of former days which many have given up, as they give up ancient ideas, with difficulty. Gold, jewelry, velvet, and silk braidings enveloped the body so ostentatiously that the imagination could hardly conceive, under this barbaric splendor, the lungs, the muscles, the bones, and the old skin covered with gray hairs, that were actually there.

From under his tufted eyebrows there darted a glance which was at once violent, inquisitive, and full of inexpressible pride.

He came forward in solemn silence.

I expected a sharp clash of personalities; as a matter of fact, from that moment on things happened that remain in my memory as if enveloped in a mysterious mist.

All the men there, with a single movement, placed their bodies in position, and I saw them

execute the military salute according to the principles they patiently teach in the barracks to recruits from the country.

Their faces contracted almost imperceptibly, their flashing eyes took on a dull, fixed luster. Ten centuries of an imposed and accepted custom swallowed up and suddenly froze their joints, muscles, and souls.

A breeze passed, whirling away a bit of thistledown; and as I saw it dance off, as high as my head, I thought, I know not why, of that critical spirit which is so fine, so free, so delicate. It disappeared in a gust, and we heard the buzzing of a big insect loaded down with pollen.

I was stupefied. A long moment passed before the snowy mustache decided to give out the words, "Good-day, gentlemen!"

The visitation began in the rooms which were crowded with the wounded from the Battle of the Marne. There lay young men who had found themselves face to face with war and who seemed to have calmly recognized in it the ancient demon of the species. They spoke of it at this time just

as they still speak of it now, when three years of blood, suffering, and cruelty have decimated, mutilated, and broken them.

But no one was concerned with these souls. The sheets were pulled back, the dressings were opened, the wounds were uncovered. They were nothing any more but cases and lesions.

A sort of scientific discussion seemed imminent, which I was awaiting with the liveliest curiosity. As I have already said, there were princes of science present. They came on the field with points of view that seemed to me profoundly independent, keen, even aggressive. And, owing to this, I foresaw a fine tilting of lances.

M. Dufrêne leaned over a thigh in which a machine gun had dug a black, quivering hole.

"What do you put on that, Proby?" he asked.

Professor Proby flung himself into a detailed explanation of the way in which he handled such wounds.

"With these," he said, "I have been accustomed for thirty years to use tents, and I have spoken on this subject before the Academy of Medicine—

How 's that?—And nothing else has given me such good results, because—"

The interesting discussion had reached this point when the inspector rapped dryly with his pencil on the wounded man's bedside table.

"Make haste, Proby, my friend," he said, in a calm and cutting voice.

Proby gave a slight start and announced once more: "For more than thirty years, I have always used tents—"

"Believe me, Proby, we 've had enough of that! You will put no more tents in wounds; do you understand? Is that clear?"

M. Dufrêne turned his back and began to examine the next wounded man.

I took a stealthy look at Professor Proby's face. I was sure the respectable academician was going to jump with rage. The beautiful scientific controversy, awaited so eagerly, was at last going to join issue—the issue of its ideas, like glittering blades, before me. I waited, holding my breath.

In a religious silence the academician replied,

"Very well, *Monsieur le Médecin inspecteur général.*"

I looked at all the faces, one after another. It seemed to me that a glove had been thrown into the ring and that some one was going to pick it up with an audacious courtesy. But all eyes revealed an expression at once vague and attentive. Professor Proby took a few steps after the inspector. He repeated mechanically, "Very well, *Monsieur le Médecin inspecteur général.*"

Thirty years of practice and experience had vanished like an extinguished light.

M. Dufrêne went from bed to bed with a ponderous majesty. "You were wrong to operate on that man," he said; you would have done better to temporize."

At other times he would say with approval, "There is a result that justifies our great methods!"

For the most part he criticized without restraint: "Why have you not used my apparatus, the Dufrêne apparatus? I wish you to use that apparatus here."

Then a murmur would arise, full of assents and

promises. To everything Proby replied punctiliously: "Yes, *Monsieur le Médecin inspecteur général*. Quite so, *Monsieur le Médicin inspecteur général*."

Dr. Coupé, very red, lost himself in words of approval that seemed much like excuses.

I watched M. Briavoine; he was nodding his head regularly up and down and murmuring with dignity, "Evidently, *Monsieur le Médecin inspecteur général*."

In fact, these latter words kept returning to everybody's lips, pronounced in reply to the least monosyllable, spoken with a mechanical promptness that was almost like stuttering, so that every phrase, every reply, seemed to end in that ritual sound, "*Mossinspecteurjral*."

M. Dufrêne appeared less and less able to contain the lyrical triumph that possessed him. With an increasing frequency and volubility he spoke of himself and his works. It seemed to me that he had a tendency to qualify as "very French," as "national," and at times as "the genius of the race," methods and ideas which were strictly per-

sonal to him. This effort to be objective bore, nevertheless, only the faintest relation to modesty.

At one moment this imposing personage came toward me, without seeing me, and with such impetuosity that I drew hastily to one side, as one does for a locomotive. Even I uttered, on this occasion, a few hasty words that turned out to be these: "Pardon me, *Monsieur le Médecin inspecteur général.*"

Never in my obscure life as a teacher had I had the chance to observe at close quarters and listen to a military man of such importance. I had held conversations with reservists who had been transformed in their appearance during their periods of military service, but I had known only through reading or the imagination the virile silhouette of the true old soldier. Watching and listening to this doctor in boots, I was saying to myself: "At last! That one 's authentic!" I was stunned, crushed. I was able, nevertheless, to draw from this state of mind a feeling of security and confi-

dence, and I would conclude at each moment: "What brass! What brass! But with fellows like that victory is sure, at least."

The inspector had seized a fountain-pen and was covering the walls with schemas. He was showing in precise formulas how he wished us to think and act henceforth. After each of his assertions his audience would chant the liturgical response, "Yes, *Mossinspecteurjral*."

"You must remember," he said, "that you are soldiers before everything else. When you assumed the uniform you assumed responsibilities. Scientific independence must bow before the necessity of a general method. Personal experience must abdicate before discipline."

At this simple injunction personal experience did abdicate before discipline. With one voice the least disciplined race in the world replied, "Unquestionably, *Monsieur le Médecin inspecteur général*."

The young man with spectacles was standing near me, his hands hanging, his eyes on the sheath

of his sword. I heard him murmur in the ear of a neighbor these strange words, "Times have changed: this man's day has arrived."

His words seemed to me out of place. Nevertheless, they had the effect of bringing me out of my torpor, and I began to reflect, hard, on the unbelievable phenomenon that was developing in front of me.

This phenomenon was entering its critical stage. The inspector was examining a large room where surgical dressings were made.

"This hall," he said, "is spacious and well arranged. It was laid out under my instructions in 'ninety-five, when I was reorganizing the hospital. Indeed, the whole establishment is in a satisfactory condition. Have you anything to complain of, Coupé?"

Dr. Coupé grew red, looked troubled, and finally declared, "Nothing at all, *Mossinspecteurjral*."

M. Briavoine, who was also consulted, seemed to reflect and then replied that there was nothing to be desired.

As for Professor Proby, he came out of his coma

and hastened to stammer: "Oh! as to that—but everything is all right, *Mossinspecteurjral*."

One phrase of M. Briavoine's came back to my mind. I saw him again buttoning up his smock and saying, "What have I to expect?" I looked now with profound astonishment at his attentive face, at his whole respectful bearing. I looked, too, at his colleagues, and as I considered all these men who expected nothing from their renunciation, and who were abdicating so completely, in such bewilderment, I conceived an immense admiration for them and I caught the true sense of the word "discipline." But the conceptions of the intelligence are often betrayed by other less noble impulses; at this very moment I had difficulty in restraining a strong desire to laugh.

M. Dufrêne had stopped in the middle of the ward. Fifty wounded men lay there, some of them talking in low voices, others groaning at intervals, still others wandering in delirium. The inspector clapped his hands and at once there was complete silence. The least disciplined race in the world ceased to be delirious or to complain.

"Soldiers," he said in a formidable voice, "the Government of the Republic has sent me here—me—to be among you all and to see how you are cared for. You may judge of the solicitude of the Republic where you are concerned."

From one end of the hall to the other, heads were raised, necks stretched, and all those who still had a breath left in their lungs answered together, "Thank you, General."

M. Dufrêne moved away. Behind him the least disciplined race in the world moved in good order down a stairway that led to the gardens.

I still followed, at the tail of the throng.

The shadow of the stairway enveloped me, and before my dazzled eyes there began to dance a number of multicolored interrogation-points. They vanished, and I had a vision of a great theater in which men appeared in turn, said what had been taught them, and went off together in line, in good order, some still talking, others executing dances, others carrying burdens, still others dying. On the pediment was engraved a word

that I could not manage to decipher, but which suddenly became luminous when I heard the young man in spectacles say in a low voice to his companion:

"It 's a convention, a striking convention, just one of the many conventions of life. It 's very curious, but not more so than the one that compels us to arrange the words of our conversations in such and such an order."

We reached the garden. The green and amber-colored light of the beautiful late summer's day dispelled all my dreams.

The inspector had grouped all his auditors about him and was saying:

"You, Coupé, I congratulate warmly. And when I do so, I am not unaware of the profound satisfaction I cause you."

M. Dufrêne was not mistaken, for the excellent Dr. Coupé was blushing to the roots of his white hair with pleasure.

There were other congratulations. There was also some censure. Those who had been praised found themselves surrounded by a flattering group.

Those who had been blamed experienced both humiliation and isolation. Thus, for instance, a little later we saw Professor Proby withdraw, alone and shamefaced, like a school-boy who has been sent into a corner.

M. Briavoine with his own hands shut the door of the automobile. As the car was about to start, the phenomenon of the salute occurred again: every left arm fell straight down the length of the body, all the right arms rose together. The least disciplined race in the world stiffened into the prescribed attitude. The automobile went off, honking.

"In spite of everything, he is a very remarkable man," said Dr. Coupé, who seemed to be awakening out of a deep slumber. And he repeated, "Yes, in spite of everything."

Among the group I noticed the personage with the horizontal beard. That beautiful beard of his seemed to insist on sloping toward his chest; he set it back at its usual level with a deliberate movement of his chin, and declared:

"He was certainly very kind; but I shall not

hesitate, when the opportunity comes, to tell him frankly what I think."

"Certainly," said M. Briavoine, "one should never carry obedience to the point of giving up one's power of judgment."

They all had the air of men who have been intoxicated by a subtle poison but who are little by little coming back to their senses.

The perfumed breeze wandered over the lawn. I saw a mad little piece of thistle-down, winged and flaky, pass before my eyes. With a skilful gesture M. Briavoine caught it, as if it were a fly, and looked at it dreamily as he completed his thought.

"With us," he said, "discipline does n't exclude the critical spirit."

I saw, indeed, that the critical spirit had come back.

The group dispersed. I contemplated the points of my shoes. The register for observations weighed down my arm, and I was trying to understand, to understand, when a hand fell heavily upon my shoulder:

"Well! You 're not in prison, my boy! That 's right! That 's right!"

Red and apoplectic, the officer of the administration was contemplating me with a furious look, in the depths of which there was a sort of lugubrious appeal. He added: "Lodge your complaint! We 'll see!"

I raised my eyes toward the façade of the building. It was ornamented with a clock.

Then, bringing my heels together, raising my right hand to the height of my *képi*, I replied simply:

"*Monsieur l'officier*, I shall not lodge a complaint. It is five minutes of twelve. By noon I shall be in prison."

The whole bull-dog face relaxed. I thought he was going to thank me. He contented himself with stammering, "That 's something like!"

He went off. I made my way without laughing toward the disciplinary section.

You know the rest. I spent four days and four nights there. It was about the middle of September. At that moment the finest soldiers of

France were accomplishing such a task that an immense sigh of relief rose up from the entire country. It was in a prison that I, too, was permitted to offer to these men my humble prayer of thanksgiving. I made in those four days a thousand very curious reflections. But I shall tell you about that another time.

XIV

CUVELIER THE CUIRASSIER

IT 'S heavy on my heart, the story of the cuirassier Cuvelier. M. Poisson is not a bad man, far from it! He 's just a little too old, you see!

We ought not to go to war, with all those old men! You know how much it has cost us. And the most curious thing about it, Monsieur, is that the whole world knows it; for at last they 're sending them all off in limousines, those fellows, one after the other. But don't let 's talk about that; it 's almost politics, and I know it does n't concern me.

As for M. Poisson, he has one supreme fault: he drinks. Aside from that he 's not, as I have said, a bad sort of man. But, believe me, when a man's constitution is saturated with little drinks, and still more with big drinks, it ends by being ruined, that constitution. M. Poisson drinks, and

that is very unfortunate for a person who occupies an important position.

And then there 's another thing to note about him: he 's not like the rest of us civilians. Indeed, he 's a unique specimen. You get the impression that for M. Poisson the world is divided into two parts. On the one side are all those who are above him. When he turns toward that side he salutes and says: "Certainly, General; quite so, Colonel!" On the other side are all those who are inferior to him. When he looks in that direction he grows red and begins to shout: "Shut up! Hold your tongue!" and all sorts of things like that. I believe at bottom he is right, and that you have to be like that in affairs of this sort. So, I repeat, he 's not so much bad as timid. He shouts out that way just to show that he is n't afraid.

But, after all, these are military matters and in a way they don't concern us. Let us talk of something else. It is a principle of mine never to talk of things which are, in their own way, sacred.

What I have personally to reproach M. Poisson

with is his having put me in the morgue, in the "amphi," as he called it—I, who can write a round hand, a slanting hand, a Gothic hand, a flowing hand, and more than a dozen others; I, who might have made such an admirable office secretary!

Imagine a reception like this: I arrive with my helmet, my duffle-bag, my whole outfit. They send me into a barrack and say to me, "The head doctor 's in there."

At first I see nothing. M. Poisson is buried up to his hair in his papers; all I can hear is a faint asthmatic breathing, like the sound of the wind through the keyholes. All at once he emerges from his nest and looks at me. I see an old fellow, rather stout and with rather short legs, who impresses me as not being very clean about his person, with his nails ringed with black and too much skin on the tops of his hands, a wrinkled face covered with red blotches. He looks at me, but he acts as if he did not see me. As for me, I look him in the face and this is what I see: a nose covered with little varicose veins, bluish cheeks,

too much skin hanging down under this chin, like the muzzle of some animal, and two trembling pouches under the eyes which look like two little glasses of whisky, two pouches you feel like pricking with a pin.

He looks at me again, spits on the ground, and says, "Yes."

I speak up, "*Exactly, Monsieur le Médecin-chef.*"

Then he begins to shout, with the voice of a sputtering old man: "Can't you see I 'm not talking to you? Hold your tongue! Can't you see I 'm up to my ears with this offensive going on and the wounded and all this red tape?"

What do you think I ought to reply? I stand at attention and say again, "*Yes, Monsieur le Médecin-chef!*"

Then he lights a cigarette and begins to say, "hum! hum!" for, kindly note, his chest is never clear, thanks to that alcohol.

Whereupon an officer comes in. M. Poisson cries out:

"That you, Perrin? Ah! my dear fellow, leave

me in peace! With all this business going on, you can see quite well my back 's fairly broken with work. Look here. Look at this paper of mine. Nineteen! I 'll never get through. Nineteen!"

The officer takes me by the arm and says, "Yes, but here we have reinforcements!"

Then M. Poisson comes up, stares in my face, and roars, with that breath of his smelling like the bottom of a barrel:

"Ship him off to the morgue! They need some one at the morgue; very well! send him to the 'amphi.' He can help Tanquerelle. That 's the thing! To the 'amphi'! and don't bother me with any more interruptions like this!"

Ten minutes later the "amphi" has appropriated me.

Monsieur, it made me miserable. I have a good enough disposition, but that 's no sort of life, moving dead men all day long. And such dead men! —the flower of the country, annihilated in a way

you would n't believe it possible the human body could be annihilated.

Tanquerelle had been bookkeeper in a pork-butcher's shop. There was another fellow who drank! They made him do all the dirty work because he drank, and they gave him drink under the pretext that he did all the dirty work. Well, don't let 's talk any more about that. That question of alcoholism, unfortunately, does n't concern me!

Tanquerelle was no sort of company; he was a calamity, a scourge, a perfect nuisance, as people say. When he was on the water-wagon he did n't talk, but he was never on the water-wagon. His usual habit was to talk every kind of nonsense, the drunkard's reflections that are very painful to hear in the presence of the dead.

They say, Monsieur, that corpses don't amount to much, and that when you get used to living with them, you come to look on them as if they were so many stones. Well, that was not the case with me. All these corpses I passed my days with

finally came to seem to me like companions. Some of them I enjoyed; I almost hated to see them go. Sometimes, when I clumsily struck one of them with my elbow, I had to restrain myself from saying, "I beg pardon, my friend!" I kept looking at them, with their hands covered with callous spots, their poor feet tough and horny from having been dragged about over the roads, and all these things touched my heart.

I would see a cheap ring on some finger, a birthmark on the skin, an old scar, sometimes even a bit of tattooing—one of those things, in a word, from which a man does not separate himself even in death: his poor gray hair, the lines in his face, the remains of a smile about his eyes, more often the stamp of terror. And all that would set my brain working. I would read their stories in their bodies, think of all the things they had seen with those eyes, think how they had worked with those arms I saw there, and how some one had kissed their lips, and how vain they had been of their mustaches, or their beards, on which I now saw the lice crawling, chilled by the coldness of the skin.

I thought of these things while I was sewing them up in the heavy canvas; and it filled me with a sadness that was really surprising, for at bottom I did not dislike it.

But I see I am drifting into philosophy. Enough! I 'm not a philosopher to allow myself to bore you.

I believe I was speaking to you about the cuirassier Cuvelier? Well, let 's return to the story of the cuirassier Cuvelier.

It goes back to the May attacks. I assure you I did n't loaf during those months! The number of dead men that passed through my hands! Their wives and mothers may set their minds at rest: I did my duty as best I could. They all went off, their mouths closed with chin-straps, their hands crossed on their breasts—whenever, that is, they still had hands and chins—and I sewed them up carefully. I say nothing of their eyes: I was n't able to close them; it 's too late for that when they reach the "amphi." Oh, I took good care of them, those dead men of mine!

Well, one day they brought me one who had no

label. The face had been very much injured and he wore bandages pretty much everywhere on his legs and arms; but there was no label, no tag on his wrist, nothing!

I put him to one side and sent to notify the head doctor.

In a moment the door opened and M. Poisson appeared.

He always holds himself very well when he has just put a drink behind his nose: I 'm aware of it, however, from the little ways he has of coughing, spitting on the ground, and jerking his cross about; for you know he is an officer of the Legion of Honor.

"You have one fellow here that is n't accounted for?" he said to me.

"*Monsieur le Médecin-chef*, I don't know that he 's not accounted for, but he does n't carry any identification tag."

"That is n't all," continued M. Poisson, "I see you have eight corpses here—just wait a minute—" He pulled out of his pocket a little piece of rumpled paper and turned it all about; then

he shouted: "Seven! Only seven! You ought to have only seven corpses. You are a swine! Who gave you that dead man there? I don't want him! He 's not on the list. Where in the devil did he come from, that dead one?"

I began to tremble, and replied, stammering: "I did n't notice which stretcher-bearers brought him here."

"Ah! You did n't notice! And what do you want me to do with him, with that fellow? In the first place, what 's his name?"

"But, *Monsieur le Médecin-chef*, that is exactly what we don't know; he 's not identified."

"Not identified! Well, that 's a nice mess! You 'll hear from me about this! Ah, I don't like this sort of business! To begin with, follow me."

And so we set off from barrack to barrack, M. Poisson asking at each door: "Is it you who are sending us dead men without papers?"

As you may well imagine, all M. Poisson's subordinates, when they were questioned in this fashion, made themselves small, as people say.

Some of them wriggled out from under; others took fright. They all, without exception, replied: "An unidentified dead man? Oh! *Monsieur le Médecin-chef*, he surely did not come from us!"

M. Poisson began to breathe painfully; he wheezed like a foundered horse; he spat all about him; his voice, because of his anger, no longer resembled anything human: it was a worn-out voice, positively in holes and tatters.

In spite of his bad character, he ended by making me sorry for him, the poor old man!

He went back to his office, with me still at his heels, and flung himself upon his papers; he dug about in them like a water-spaniel in the mud. Then, with splutterings of rage, he continued:

"Look here! one thousand, two hundred and thirty-six have come in. Five hundred and sixty-one have gone out. Do you understand? At present there are six hundred and seventy-four here. Now we have it! There 's one lacking, and that fellow 's the extra one. And we don't

know who he is! We 're in a nice mess! a nice mess!"

I confess that M. Poisson's assurance impressed me. I was particularly surprised at the precision of the figures he gave. It 's really remarkable, Monsieur, to see the order that reigns in military affairs; you can always, for example, speak exactly: of a hundred stretchers twenty-five have been lost, not one more, not one less; or a thousand wounded have been brought in of whom fifty are dead and the nine hundred and fifty others are still living. From this point of view that mathematical order is well worth the trouble of writing all the papers they do write. As I listened to M. Poisson making his calculations, I realized how much in the way my poor corpse was.

The head doctor repeated, "We 're in a nice mess!" Then he said again, "Come with me!" and he went out.

Here was M. Poisson starting off again, to the right and the left. I followed him, hanging my head, and feeling myself gradually becoming in-

fected with his fever. He stopped every officer he met.

"I 've had enough of this sort of business! Come and see if that dead man did n't come from your men this time."

He even went into the operating-rooms and questioned the surgeons: "It was n't you who sent me a dead man without a tag?"

And all the time he kept bringing out his little rumpled paper and penciling on it a number or a cross.

Toward evening he turned on me a pair of eyes with borders like a York ham, and said:

"As for you, you can go back to the amphi! You 'll hear from me again!"

I returned to the amphi and sat down sadly. They had brought in three new corpses. Tanquerelle and the carpenter were screwing down their coffin-lids.

On the table, wrapped up temporarily in a tent canvas, the unknown dead man was awaiting a decision. Tanquerelle was quite drunk and was singing the "Missouri," which is n't the thing to

do when you are occupied with corpses. I went and lifted up the tent canvas, and I took a long look at the stiff body. The whole of the wounded face was wrapped up in cloths. One could see a few locks of light-colored hair. As for the rest, it might have been any corpse whatever, yours or mine, Monsieur.

Night had fallen. The door opened and M. Poisson appeared, with a lantern, accompanied by another officer. He seemed calm and hiccoughed a little, like a man who has just dined well.

"You 're a fool!" he said to me. "You did n't even have the sense to see that that body there is the body of the cuirassier Cuvelier."

"But, *Monsieur le Médecin-chef*—"

"Hold your tongue! It 's the cuirassier Cuvelier."

He approached the table, measured the corpse with his eye, and exclaimed:

"Unquestionably! He 's tall enough to be a cuirassier. You see, Perrin, the cuirassier Cuvelier was brought in by the ambulance the day before yesterday. According to the register, he has

not gone out. But he is no longer undergoing treatment; therefore he is dead, and that is he over there. Obvious enough!"

"Quite obvious!" said Perrin. "It is undoubtedly he."

"Is n't it?" went on M. Poisson. "It 's Cuvelier; that 's perfectly plain. Poor devil! Now let 's go to bed." Then he turned to me: "You 're to put him in his coffin and glue on the lid, 'Cuvelier, Edouard, Ninth Cuirassiers.' And, mind you, no more of this sort of business."

The gentlemen went out. I put the cuirassier Cuvelier in a coffin and went to spend a few hours on my pallet.

The next morning I was getting ready to nail down the coffin-lid of Cuvelier, Edouard, when I saw M. Poisson coming in again. His face was not so calm as the evening before.

"Wait a little before you have that fellow buried," he said to me.

He walked around the end of the bier, chewing the end of a cigarette, agitated by a catarrh that

seemed as old as humanity; in short, he had so disturbed an air that I saw clearly that he had not made up his mind to thrust Cuvelier into eternity just that way. That was not to be: the dead man had thwarted our plans, he did not mean to let himself be engulfed. I don't know whether M. Poisson had a lofty conception of his duty or simply a fear of complications, but at this moment he filled me with a poignant sympathy.

He turned toward me and as if he did not want to be alone. "Come," he said; "come along with me again."

So off we went again through the barracks. M. Poisson would go in and say:

"Pavilion Eight? Is this a pavilion for the severely wounded? You have n't the cuirassier Cuvelier here?"

The men in the pavilion would consult together and answer, "No."

We would go on.

M. Poisson would begin again: "Pavilion Seven? Have you a man named Cuvelier here, belonging to the Ninth Cuirassiers?"

"No, *Monsieur le Médecin-chef.*"

Then M. Poisson would say triumphantly: "Of course! They can't have him, and it 's because he 's dead. I do this to satisfy my conscience. That 's the way I am."

We ran into M. Perrin.

"You see, Perrin," the head doctor said to him, "in order to be quite easy in my mind I am looking through the wards to see if there is n't a Cuvelier there. And there is n't. Of course I look only in the wards for the seriously wounded; I 'm no fool! If he 's dead, he must have been seriously wounded."

"That 's plain," said M. Perrin.

When we had visited all the pavilions M. Poisson erected his head, which made all sorts of folds in the skin that hung down under his chin, and concluded thus:

"It 's certainly Cuvelier! This is what it means to have system! In my hospital things don't go on as they do in the hospitals of those damn fools Pouce and Viellon."

"Perhaps, just the same," said M. Perrin, "you

ought to enquire among the slightly wounded, just for the sake of prudence."

"Oh, well, if you wish!" said M. Poisson, carelessly.

And we turned our steps toward the pavilion of the "Evacuables."

We went in; we asked the usual question. No one answered. Just as we were going out M. Poisson repeated, "Cuvelier is n't here?"

Then we heard some one suddenly cry out, "Yes, Cuvelier is here!" And a big curly-haired fellow rose up out of his bed, brandishing a hand that wore a very small bandage.

Then matters became tragic. M. Poisson turned a deep purple, like a man struck with apoplexy. He spat two or three times in rapid succession. He struck the flaps of his pockets and said hoarsely:

"Good enough! So he turns out to be alive, that fellow!"

"Cuvelier," returned the other; "that 's me!"

"Cuvelier, Edouard?"

"Edouard, yes."

"Of the Ninth Cuirassiers?"

"Exactly, of the Ninth Cuir!"

M. Poisson went out like a madman, followed by M. Perrin, followed by me. He marched to the morgue, planted himself before the bier, sputtered all over his jacket, and said simply, "If it's not Cuvelier, then we have to begin all over again."

Ah, Monsieur! what a day! What a memory!

The offensive was going on all this whole time. The dead completely filled the small quarters that had been reserved for them. But the real life of the department seemed to be suspended.

Have you ever seen ships halted in the midst of a river and stopping all the traffic? Well, our unknown corpse was like that. It was stranded across the current of our work and threatened to interfere with everything, beginning with the health of the unhappy M. Poisson, who talked of getting himself evacuated.

He would come at all times to take a glance at

the body, which had quietly begun to decompose. He would look at it fixedly, as if he hoped to make the dead break its silence.

During the afternoon I had a few moments of peace. M. Poisson was taking his siesta. Toward six o'clock he reappeared, and I had difficulty in recognizing him. His hands were almost washed, his beard trimmed, he wore a white collar and had the breath of a man who has just cleared his mouth with a glass of good old wine.

"Well, come now!" he said to me; "have n't you finished nailing up the German's coffin yet? You 're not a perfect fool, are you?"

"But, *Monsieur le Médecin-chef*—"

"Shut up! And make a plate quickly: 'German subject, unknown.' Understand?"

M. Perrin had just come in. The two officers took one more look at the corpse.

"You can see it 's a Boche," said M. Poisson.

"Yes, look at that blond hair."

"Perrin, you ought to have thought of it sooner," added the head doctor.

The gentlemen were about to go out when Poisson turned back.

"After all, take him out of the coffin. He 's a German; let him be buried without one, in the usual way."

XV

REVAUD'S ROOM

TIME did not hang heavy in Revaud's room. The rumbling of the war, the sound of the convoys marching past, the epileptic shocks of the cannonade, all the whistlings and pantings of the great machine of slaughter, reached his windows and shook them with an exhausted fury, as the ineffectual echoes of a tempest outside penetrate the depths of a crevasse. But this uproar fell as familiarly on the ear as the very pulse-beats of the wretched world, and time did not hang heavy in Revaud's room.

It was a long, straight chamber in which there were four beds and four men. Nevertheless, it was called "Revaud's room," for Revaud's personality completely filled it, as if it had been a coat cut to his measure. At the beginning of November there had been all sorts of villainous

plots set on foot by Corporal Têtard to make Revaud change his room, and the plots succeeded. The poor man was hoisted to the upper floor, to a big dormitory of twenty beds, a splendid desert, with nothing intimate about it, ravaged by a hard and cruel light. In three days, by a sort of spontaneous decision of his soul and body, Revaud had wasted away in such an alarming fashion that it had been necessary to take him down in haste, behind his own door, to the back of his room, where the winter light came in filtered and full of a sort of indulgence.

That 's how matters stood; when a man who was really seriously wounded, a very special case, was brought to the division, they would at once beg Mme. Baugan to take the matter up with Revaud. Revaud had to be coaxed a little, but he would always end by saying:

"All right, all right! Good heavens! I don't care! Put the fellow in my room, of course."

And Revaud's room was always full. In order to get there, it was not enough to have a mere broken collar-bone, or a smashed foot, or a little

unimportant amputation of an arm. You must have "something strange and extraordinary the matter with you," a gap in the little intestine, for example, or a lesion of the spinal marrow, or you must be one of those cases where the "skull is crushed flat."

"In here," Revaud would say with pride, "in here we are all very rare cases."

There was Sandrap, a little man from the North, with a nose as round as a young apple, with beautiful, soft, light-gray eyes. He had been wounded three times and used to say every morning: "They 'd be struck all of a heap, those Boches, if they could see me now!"

There was Remusot, who had a great wound in his breast. It made a sound like "faouaou-raouaou, faouaou-raouaou," and Revaud had said on the very first day:

"That 's a queer noise you make! Do you do it with your mouth?"

The other had whispered in a toneless voice, "It 's my breath trying to get through my ribs."

Finally there was Mery, whose spinal column

had been broken by an explosive, and who "had no more feeling left in the whole lower half of his body than if it had not belonged to him."

All this little world of men lived on their backs, each in his place, in a general promiscuity of odor, noise, and sometimes thought. They knew one another by their voices rather than by sight, and Sandrap had been there a whole week before Revaud, seeing him pass on the stretcher close to his bed, on his way to be dressed, suddenly called out to him:

"Look here, Sandrap, you certainly have a funny sort of head! And you have a funny kind of hair, too!"

Mme. Baugan would arrive at eight o'clock, and she would at once begin to scold: "It smells bad here. Oh, oh! my poor Revaud!"

Revaud would evade the question.

"It 's all right," he would say. "I 've slept all right. I 've nothing to complain of as far as that goes. I 've slept all right."

Mme. Baugan would bustle about, getting fresh

clothes and water; she would set about Revaud's toilet as if he were a child.

All at once, however, seized with shame and a sort of despair, the wounded man groaned:

"Madame Baugan, you must n't be angry with me: I was n't like this in civil life!"

Mme. Baugan began to laugh, and Revaud, without waiting, began to laugh too, for his whole face and his whole soul were made for laughter and he loved to laugh, even in the midst of the worst torment.

Having found that this reply pleased her, he brought it out often, and he would say to every one who came over to him, referring to his great misfortune, "I was n't like that in civil life, you know."

The happiest phrases have only an hour's success. Revaud, who had brains, saw clearly that the moment was approaching when it would no longer do to affirm that "he had not been like that in civil life." It was then that he received the letter from his father. It arrived unexpectedly,

one morning when he had just had his big old-fashioned French mustache cut, out of pure whim, after the American fashion. The whole hospital was sneaking past the corner of the door to have a peep at Revaud, who looked like some very sick foreign gentleman. He turned the letter over in his fingers, deformed by poverty and hard work, then he said with an air of uneasiness: "What are they after me now for, with that letter?"

Revaud was married; but as he had been six months without word from his wife, he had grown comfortably used to his isolation. He was in his own room, behind his own door, and he was n't looking for a quarrel with any one. Why, then, should they send him a letter?

"What are they after me for now?" he repeated. And he held the letter out for Mme. Baugan to read to him.

It was a letter from Revaud's father. In ten lines of elaborate handwriting, full of thin strokes, heavy strokes, embellishments and flourishes, the old man announced that he was going to make him a visit at a near but unspecified date.

Once more Revaud found in laughter the ultimate object of his life. The whole day he played carelessly with the letter and cheerfully showed it to people, saying: "We 're going to have a visit. My father 's coming to see us."

Then he would add, confidentially: "My father 's quite well off, you know, but he has had misfortunes. Just wait till you see my father; he has a whole bag full of tricks, that man has; and, besides, he wears a stiff collar."

Revaud ended by limiting all characterizations of his father's personality to this last statement: "My father! You wait and see: he wears a stiff collar."

The days passed, and Revaud spoke so often of his father that in the end he did n't know whether the visit had taken place or not. And so, by a special grace of heaven, Revaud never noticed that his father had not come to see him. Later, to signify this remarkable period, he would use words that sounded very big, and would say, "It was at the time of my father's visit."

Revaud was spoiled; he had no lack of cig-

arettes or company, and he would say with an air of satisfaction: "In this hospital I 'm the *charculot*," by which he meant, the favorite little chick. Well, Revaud was n't hard to please: it was enough for Tarrissant to appear between his crutches for the dying man to exclaim: "There 's some one else coming to see me! I tell you I 'm the *charculot* in here!"

Tarrissant had undergone the same operation as Revaud. It was a complicated affair which had taken place in the knee. Only, the operation had been very successful with Tarrissant and a good deal of a failure with Revaud; "for it all depends on the blood."

Even about the operation itself Revaud would have his joke: his knee had "dried up." He would look at Tarrissant, and, comparing himself with the convalescent, he would conclude without further comment:

"We are both of us dried up. Only, I 'm a fool as well. And besides I 've worked too much."

It was the only allusion that Revaud ever made

to the disgrace of his marriage and to his life of hard work.

But then, really, why should one think of all those things? Has n't a man trouble enough with a leg like that?

In the evening every one would make little preparations for the night, just like people who are getting ready for a journey. Remusot would receive an injection in his thigh and at once, bathed in sweat, he would enter a paradise where the fever displayed to him things that he was never willing to repeat to any one. Mery would have a big bowlful of his nightly concoction of herbs prepared for him, and placed where he could reach it by merely stretching out his hand. Sandrap would smoke his last cigarette, and Revaud would ask for his cushion. It was a little packet of cotton that was placed by his side. Only when he had it would Revaud consent to say: "That 's all right, boys, you can go now." And after that, they would wander through a sleep as dense and terrible as a forest strewn with ambushes, each

one steering his own way, as he pursued his dreams.

While their spirits were taking flight, their four bodies lay immovable, lighted by a small night-lamp. When a night watchman came, in his shuffling slippers, put his head in at the door, and heard the tormented breathings of these four, or surprised at times the wide-eyed, unseeing gaze of Remusot, he would think suddenly, as he watched these human relics cast up on a lee shore, of a shipwrecked raft, a raft drifting over the rolling ocean, with four human beings in distress.

The windows of the room continued to vibrate, as if in complaint, with the noise of the war. Sometimes, in the long night, the war would seem to pause, like a wood-cutter who stops to breathe between two blows of his axe.

Then they would awake, in this deep, deep silence, in a strange distress, and they would think of all that happens on the battle-field, of the hour when men no longer hear anything.

The winter dawn would appear, grudgingly, like a lazy, untidy slattern who gets up late. The attendants would come to wash the floors. They

would blow out the dying night-lamp, smelling evilly out of its last remnant of oil. Then would come the toilet, and then all the pains and groans of the dressings.

At times, in the midst of the usual daily occupations, the door would open majestically and they would see a general enter, followed by the officers of his staff. He would stop short at the very threshold, half choked by some overpowering odor, then he would advance a little way into the room and ask who these men were. The doctor would whisper a few words in his ear, and the general would reply simply: "Ah! good! Very good!"

When he had gone out, Revaud would always remark, with an air of assurance: "That general never comes here without making me a visit. I know him very well."

After that there would be something to talk about the whole day.

A good many majors came, too, and some of them carried themselves very smartly. They would look at the charts tacked up on the walls,

and say: "Well, well! They make a good showing in spite of it."

One day one of them was looking at Mery. He was a very great doctor who had a white beard, an immense waist-line, many crosses on his breast and the pink neck of a man who is always well fed. He had a kindly manner and an air of pity. In fact he said:

"Poor devil! Ah! But just suppose such a thing were to happen to me!"

But as a rule, nobody came, absolutely nobody, and the day, like the meat at meal-time, could be got through only by being cut up into an infinity of little morsels.

One day there was an event: Mery was carried off to be photographed by the X-ray. He reappeared, satisfied, saying, "That does n't hurt, anyway!"

Another time they cut off Revaud's leg. He accepted it, murmuring:

"Well, at least I did my best to keep that leg! But such is life! Go ahead, my poor man!"

He had one more laugh yet; and no one ever

has laughed or ever will laugh as Revaud laughed that day!

So they cut off his leg. The finest blood of France was shed once more. But this took place between four walls, in a little room as white as a dairy, and no one knew anything about it.

Revaud was put to bed again behind his door. He came to himself like a child and said:

"Yes, indeed! They certainly got me excited about that leg, and no joke!"

Revaud passed a fairly good night, and when Mme. Baugan entered the room the next morning, he said to her, in his usual way: "Quite well, Madame Baugan! I've slept all right!"

He said this, and then his head slipped to one side; he opened his mouth gradually, and he died without any more ado.

Mme. Baugan cried out: "Poor Revaud! Why, he's dead!"

She kissed his forehead and then at once she began to prepare him for burial; for the day's work is long and there is never any time to lose.

Mme. Baugan dressed Revaud, and she grum-

bled over it too, for it was not easy to put clothes on the corpse.

Sandrap, Mery, and Remusot said not one word. The rain trickled down the windows, which continued to tremble with the roar of the guns.

XVI

CIVILIZATION

FIRST of all, I must know what you mean when you speak of civilization. I can quite well ask you this because you are an intelligent and an educated man, and then because you are always talking about this famous civilization.

Before the war I was an assistant in an industrial laboratory. It was a good enough little place; but I assure you, if I have the melancholy luck to come out of this catastrophe alive, I shall never enter it again. The open country! Some spot where I shall never hear the whirring of your aeroplanes or any of those machines of yours that used to amuse me once, when I knew nothing about anything, but that now fill me with horror, because they are the very soul of this war, the principle and reason of this war!

I hate the twentieth century, as I hate rotten

Europe and the whole world on which this wretched Europe is spread out like a great spot of axle-grease. I know how ridiculous it is to flash out generalities like that; but, thunder! I don't say these things to every one, and besides, you might as well be ridiculous in one way as in another! I tell you that I shall go to the mountains and arrange it so that I shall be as much alone as possible. I had thought of going to live among the savages, among the black people, but there are n't even any real black people now. They all ride bicycles and want to be decorated. I shall not go to live with the black people. We have done all we could to lead them astray; I saw that clearly enough at Soissons.

In the spring of this year I was at Soissons, with all the G.B.C. I suspect G.B.C. does n't mean much to you; but that 's another reason for quarreling with you about this civilization: it rebuilt the Tower of Babel, and soon men will have so debased their native tongue that they will have made a sort of telegraphic patois out of it, without savor and without beauty.

The German retreat had carried the line over toward Vauxaillon and Laffaux, and there a good deal of fighting was going on. In one sector of the battle-field such a position as that of the mill of Laffaux was like a thorn at the bottom of a wound: it kept up the inflammation. Toward the beginning of May there was a great attack on this mill, and almost the whole of my own group had to go up into the line.

"As for you, Sergeant," the officer told me, "you are to remain at the hospital and take charge of the stretchers of the A. C. A.[1] We 'll send you men."

I knew all the subtleties of military language by this time. When I heard they were going to send me men, I knew perfectly well I was n't going to get any one, and in actual fact I remained at the head of four men who had been rejected; they were a sort of cacochymic cretins for whom no one had any use.

From Saturday on, the wounded began to arrive in groups of one hundred. And I began to

[1] Ambulance Chirurgicale Automobile.

pile them up methodically in the wards of the A. C. A.

The truth is, the work did n't go well. My poor diseased stretcher-bearers did not pair off well, they stumbled like broken-kneed nags, and made the wounded scream. They would fish men out haphazard from the enormous pile waiting to be attended to, and the whole A. C. A. shuffled its feet with impatience, like a human flesh-factory that does n't receive its raw material and revolves on itself, empty.

I must explain to you what an A. C. A. is. In the slang of the war it 's an "autochir," in other words, the most perfect thing in the line of an ambulance that has been invented. It 's the last word in science; it follows the armies with motors, steam-engines, microscopes, laboratories—the whole lock, stock, and barrel of a modern hospital. It 's the first great repair-shop the wounded man encounters after he leaves the workshop of trituration and destruction that operates at the front. Those parts of the military machine that are the worst destroyed are brought there. Skilful work-

men fling themselves upon them, unwrap them at full speed, and examine them competently, for all the world as if with a hydro-pneumatic machine, a collimator. If the part is seriously out of order, they do what they can to set it right; if the human material is not absolutely worthless, they patch it up carefully, so as to get it back into service at the first opportunity. That is what they call "the conservation of the effective."

As I have said, the A. C. A. was trembling like a machine that is going but has no material to work upon. My stretcher-bearers, with the clumsiness of drunken porters, would bring it a few wounded men, who were immediately digested and eliminated. Then the factory would continue to rumble like a Moloch whose appetite has merely been awakened by the first fumes of the sacrifice.

I had picked up a stretcher myself. With the help of an artilleryman who was wounded in the neck and who asked nothing better than to make himself useful until he was operated upon, I was steering my litter across the throng. It was then

that I saw in passing an anxious, smiling face, its forehead hidden under a casque, the face of a general, a considerate general, and I heard the words:

"Your stretcher-bearers are n't getting on very well. I am going to send you eight Malagasy. They are excellent porters."

Ten minutes later my Malagasy were there.

To speak more precisely, it was an assortment of negroes in which the Malagasy element predominated, a collection of samples chosen from the 1st Colonial Corps, which at this very hour was striking hard before Laffaux. There were a few Sudanese, of uncertain age—dark, wrinkled, hiding under their regimental jackets glowing amulets that smelt of leather, sweat, and exotic oils. As for the Malagasy, imagine men of medium height and a timid air, who looked like black and serious embryos.

All these men took up the litters and, at my order, began to carry the wounded as silently and phlegmatically as if they were unloading bales of cotton on a dock.

I was satisfied; that is to say, reassured. The

A. C. A., satiated for once, was working with full jaws, and had the hum of all well-cared-for machines which drip with oil and all of whose parts glitter.

Glitter! The word's not too strong. I was blinded by it when I went into the operating-barrack. Night had just fallen—one of those warm nights of that beautiful, brutal spring. The cannonade gave sudden leaps like a giant in torment. The wards of the hospital were crowded with a confused and surging mass of suffering beings in which death was working to restore order. I took a deep breath in the darkness of the garden, and then, as I have said, I made my way into the operating-room.

There were several compartments in it. The one in which I suddenly found myself formed a boss on the side of the building. It was as hot as a smelting-furnace in there. Men were washing, brushing, polishing with minute care a mass of glittering instruments, while others were stirring up the fires, which had the white heat of soldering-lamps. Ceaselessly, men came in and went

out, ceremoniously carrying boxes in their outstretched hands, like head waiters devoted to the stately rites of the table.

"It 's warm in your quarters," I murmured, to say something.

"Go over to the side, it will be better there," said a little man, bearded like a kobold.

I lifted a hanging, with the impression that I was penetrating into the breast of a monster. Opposite me, raised up like a monarch on a sort of throne, which one reached by a number of steps, I recognized the heart of this being. It was what they call an autoclave, a sort of immense pot in which one could cook with ease an entire calf. It rested flat on its belly and flung out a jet of vapor with a noise deafening and monotonous enough to make one lose all sense of time and space. Suddenly this infernal sound ceased, and it seemed to me like the end of eternity. A lot of little vessels on the back of the monster continued to sputter and gurgle. A man like a helmsman was turning a large wheel and the lid of the sterilizer, suddenly unscrewed, turned over, revealing a fiery

interior out of which came all sorts of packages and cases.

The heat of the furnace was succeeded by a moist, depressing warmth, like that of the sweating-room of a Turkish bath.

"But where do they operate on the wounded?" I asked a boy who was washing rubber gloves in a great copper basin.

"Over there in the operating-rooms; can't you see! But don't go in from this side."

I plunged back into the night, as into an abyss of coolness, and made my way toward the waiting-room to find my stretcher-bearers again.

At this moment they were bringing in a lot of cuirassiers. A division of dismounted cavalry had been engaged since morning. The finest men in France had been struck down by hundreds, and they were waiting there like broken statues, whose very fragments are beautiful. God! What strong, magnificent creatures! They had such big chests, such powerful limbs, that they could n't believe in death; and when they felt the rich, thick blood flowing from their veins they swore with

oaths and laughter at the breakdown of their torn flesh.

"When it 's my turn," said one of them, "they can do what they like with my carcass, but as for putting me to sleep—by God! not much!"

"Yes, whatever they like," said another, "but no amputations! I need my paw, even if it is all smashed up. I want that!"

These men were coming out of the radiograph room. They were naked under their wraps, and were wearing, pinned to their bandages, a whole outfit of many-colored tags, labels, formulas, like a sort of algebraic commentary on their wounds and the injuries of their internal organs.

They were talking about this first excursion into the laboratory like well-trained children who understand that the modern world cannot live or die any longer without the meticulous discipline of the sciences.

"What did he say, the X-ray major?"

"He said it was an anteroposterior axis. I suspected as much myself."

"As for me, mine 's in the stomach. He said

the abdomen, but I know it 's in the stomach, all right. The devil take it! But I don't want to be put to sleep! I won't have that, if I know myself!"

The door of the operating-room opened at this moment and a flood of light deluged the waiting-room. A voice called out:

"Next! And the stomach case first."

The black porters adjusted their shoulder-straps and the two speakers were carried off. I followed the stretchers.

Imagine a luminous rectangular block, set in the night like a jewel in a lump of coal. The door shut again, and I found myself imprisoned in the brightness. On the ceiling an immaculate canvas diffused the bright light from the lamps. The springy floor was strewn with red cloths which the orderlies were quickly picking up with pincers. Between the floor and the ceiling were four strange forms which were men. They were entirely clothed in white. Their faces were completely covered by masks which, like those of the Touaregs, concealed everything but the eyes; they were hold-

ing their rubber-covered hands spread out in the air, in the fashion of Chinese dancers, and the sweat was streaming from their temples.

One could hear faintly the whirring of the motor that generated all these lights. The autoclave, once more gorged with food, filled the universe with its strident wail. Little radiators snorted like animals whose fur is stroked the wrong way. All this made a barbaric and yet grandiose music, and the men moving about there seemed to be performing, harmoniously, some religious dance, some grave and mysterious sort of ballet.

The stretchers wound their way among the tables like canoes about an archipelago. The instruments, arranged on white cloths, shone like the windows of a goldsmith; and the little Malagasy handled their burdens with care and docility. They stopped when they were ordered and waited. Their black, thin necks, encircled by the yokes, their shriveled fingers about the handles of the stretchers, made one think of sacred monkeys, trained to carry idols. The two cuirassiers, im-

mense, pale, stretched beyond the litters both at the head and the foot.

There were a few ritualistic gestures and the wounded men found themselves on the tables.

At this moment my glance met that of one of the blacks and I had a sensation of sickness. It was a calm, profound gaze like that of a child or a young dog. The savage was turning his head gently from right to left and looking at the extraordinary beings and objects that surrounded him. His dark pupils lingered lightly over all the marvelous details of this workshop for repairing the human machine. And these eyes, which betrayed no thought, were none the less disquieting. For one moment I was stupid enough to think, "How astonished he must be!" But this silly thought left me, and I no longer felt anything but an insurmountable shame.

The four Malagasy went out. I felt somewhat relieved. The wounded men seemed bewildered, stupefied. The attendants hurried about them, tying their hands, their legs, rubbing them with alcohol. The masked men gave orders and moved

about the tables with the measured gestures of officiating priests.

"Who is in charge in there?" I asked some one, quite low.

He was pointed out to me. He was a man of medium height, seated and holding his gloved hands in the air while he dictated something to a secretary.

Fatigue, the noise of the cannonade, the dazzling lights, the hum of industry about me, all contributed to give me a sort of lucid intoxication. I remained motionless, carried away in a turmoil of thoughts. All these things that surrounded me were made for a good purpose. It was civilization's reply to itself, the correction it was giving to its own destructive eruptions; it took all this complexity to efface a little of the immense harm engendered by the age of the machines. I thought once more of the inexplicable look of the savage, and the emotion I felt was made up of pity, anger, and disgust.

The man whom they had pointed out as the chief had finished dictating. He remained mo-

tionless in his heraldic position and seemed to be dreaming. I noticed that behind his spectacles there burned a beautiful grave look, mingled of serenity, ardor, and sadness. One could see almost nothing of his face, the mask concealed the mouth and the beard; but the temples revealed a few newly gray locks and a swollen vein on his forehead betrayed the efforts of a strained will.

"The wounded man has gone off" some one murmured.

The surgeon approached the table. The wounded man was indeed unconscious, and I saw that it was the same one who had declared so energetically that he did not wish to be put to sleep. The poor man had not even dared to stammer out his protest. Caught in the mill-hopper, he had been immediately mastered and had abandoned himself to the appetite of the machine, like pig-iron swallowed up by the rolling-mill. And besides, did n't he know that all this was for his own good, since good has been reduced to this pass?

"Sergeant," a voice said to me, "you must n't

stay in the operating-room without a cap."

Just as I was going out, I looked at the surgeon once more. He was leaning over his work with an earnestness in which, in spite of habit, in spite of his costume, his gloves and all that apparatus about him, one could discern a certain tenderness. I thought with a sudden vehemence: "No! No! That man is not taken in by it!"

I found myself again in the waiting-room with its smell of blood, like the lair of some wild animal. A shaded lamp filled it with a dim light. Some wounded men were groaning; others were talking in low voices.

"Who's talking about tanks?" said one of them. "I was wounded in a tank." A short, respectful silence followed. The man, who was buried under bandages, added: "Our gasolene reservoir was split open, my legs were broken, and my face is burned. I know what a tank is, I do!"

He said this with a strange accent in which I recognized that ancient tormentor of humanity, pride.

I went off to smoke a pipe in the heart of the

darkness. The world seemed to me confused, incoherent and unhappy; and in my opinion it really is so.

Believe me, Monsieur, when I speak with pity of civilization I know what I 'm talking about; and it 's not the wireless telegraph that can make me change my views. It 's all the sadder, because there 's nothing one can do about it: you can't climb back up a slope like that down which the world is going to roll from now on. And yet!

Civilization! the true Civilization—I often think of it. It is like a choir of harmonious voices chanting a hymn in my heart, it is a marble statue on a barren hill, it is a man saying, "Love one another!" and "Return good for evil!" But for nearly two thousand years people have done nothing but repeat these things over and over, and the princes and the priests have far too many interests in the age as it is to conceive other things like them.

Men are mistaken about goodness and happiness. The most generous souls are mistaken also, for solitude and silence are too often denied them.

CIVILIZATION

I have taken a good look at the monstrous autoclave on its throne. I tell you truly, civilization is not in that object any more than it is in the shining pincers that the surgeons use. Civilization is not in all that terrible pack of trumpery wares; and if it is not in the heart of man, well! it 's nowhere.

THE END

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